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THREE TYPES OF MODERN TRAGICOMEDY: NATURALISTIC, THEATRICAL AND GROTESQUE

by

© LINDA M. NURME

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Three Types of Modern Tragicomedy: Naturalistic, Theatrical and Grotesque," submitted by Linda M. Nurme in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Tragicomedy has appeared in each of the three great periods of drama: the Graeco-Roman period; the Renaissance; and the Modern Age. An examination of the history of the concept of tragicomedy suggests that the modern form of tragicomedy is distinctly different from its predecessors. It is a synthetic genre, involving a reciprocity between comic and tragic elements in such a way that the effect of each is not reduced but heightened. The lack of morphological constants in comedy or tragedy requires that the discussion of tragicomedy be in terms of effect or according to how various elements function as tragicomic in the context of the play.

Modern tragicomedies may be organized into three basic types according to their mimetic structure: (1) the naturalistic play, which emphasizes typicality; (2) the theatrical tragicomedy, which employs some aspect of the spectacle as a metaphor for life; and (3) the grotesque, which presents an abnormal and shocking world. Each of these types or frameworks, furthermore, is particularly suitable for expressing the tragicomic. The core of the thesis is the examination of these three types of tragicomedy with illustrations from various contemporary plays to support and supplement the discussion.

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INTRODUCTION

Delmonte: I play everything, classical and modern plays, tragedies and comedies.

Isabelle: And you never get them muddled, mix them up at all?

Delmonte: Never used to in the old days! Comedy was comedy and tragedy was tragedy! But with the plays we get served up nowadays, of course . . . .

Jean Anouilh, Dinner with the Family[1]

A random survey of contemporary drama, with such names as Sean O'Casey, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Friedrich Durrenmatt and Luigi Pirandello, will attest to the extent to which tragicomedy has become a favoured genre in modern world literature. It has received a great deal of attention in the twentieth century by critics as well. Tragicomedy, however, is not a phenomenon solely of contemporary civilization, but existed as a dramatic mode in the West as far back as classical Greek and Roman theatre. Despite Delmonte's statement about "the old days", one which reflects a common belief that the ancients observed strict purity of form and precise demarcation between comedy and tragedy, varieties of mixed drama were in fact a familiar phenomenon. The genre of tragicomedy became prominent again, to a far greater extent, in the sixteenth century but was understood in a new way. The modern age, with its own tastes and attitudes, employs the term in yet another way, one in accord with its disposition. Thus tragicomedy has appeared in each of the three great periods of drama: the Graeco-Roman period; the European Renaissance; and in the period from 1850/60. Over this history the term itself has remained relatively stable (tragicocomoedia, tragi-comedy, tragicomedy),

in general being preferred to its counterpart "comitragedy" (comico-tragoedia, comoedia tragica). The concept of the term (i.e., the rules of its use), however, has changed, so much so that, as was indicated above, the modern understanding of tragicomedy will show little affinity with its predecessors. This thesis is concerned with the modern concept of tragicomedy, and accordingly, the theories and examples used within it reflect as far as possible the general consensus among contemporary writers. An adequate discussion of tragicomedy, however, cannot afford to ignore the historical development of the term and of the various concepts associated with it, particularly, as will be shown in Chapter II, as some of the previous notions are still accepted today. The first chapter will, therefore, trace the history of tragicomedy. Such an overview will be useful for gaining valuable insight into this genre and will aid in establishing a working definition of modern tragicomedy.

The second chapter is devoted towards formulating such a working definition, and indicates as well some of the problems involved in so doing. The profusion of works on both comedy and tragedy today attest to the difficulties in defining these dramatic genres, and the definition of tragicomedy proves no simpler a task. The approach taken in this thesis is to discuss the genre in terms of function or effect, since any definition according to morphological or formal elements has thus far proven to be deficient and inconclusive. Tragicomedy is then defined as a synthetic phenomenon in which the comic and the tragic are integrated consistently throughout the play.

The first two chapters are thus a basis from which the actual analysis can proceed. The core of the thesis is the examination of various aesthetic frameworks in which modern tragicomedy most commonly

appears. These are three: (1) tragicomedies using a naturalistic framework; (2) tragicomedies in which theatricality constitutes the dominant framework; and (3) tragicomedies in which the grotesque is the principal medium. The criterion for this categorization was based upon the particular selection and arrangement of the elements in the text. The naturalistic play presented narrative material in such a way as to suggest typicality or the everyday world. The theatrical play, taking its story material and devices from the world of the spectacle, presents a more formalized world. The grotesque is still further removed from the domestic scene by its radicality, its extreme and exaggerated nature. Radicality, according to Philip Thomson, is the distinguishing feature of the grotesque, present "in both substance and presentation: in the subject matter presented and in the means employed in the presentation".[2]

Having discussed the basic concepts underlying each framework, the interaction between the specific framework and tragicomedy is then analyzed. Each frame is shown to be particularly disposed towards expressing the tragicomic, the features characteristic of each variety being particularly conducive to tragicomic treatment. These features are then analyzed by using examples from various modern tragicomedies. This thesis is not intended as an exhaustive examination of tragicomedy, nor does it attempt to analyze individual plays. It is a general survey of some of the characteristic techniques employed in modern tragicomedy according to the three varieties mentioned. The plays discussed have been chosen from a wider corpus, and features from them have been singled out which relate the plays to their genre. An attempt was made to give a fairly representative cross-section by including plays from a variety of countries and written at different points within the period of "Modernism".

The analysis, however, will be synchronic, with no relevance being assigned according to when a play was written, other than being a post-Enlightenment phenomenon.

Such a synoptic view will hopefully provide greater perspective into the nature of tragicomedy. As was stated earlier, much has been written recently on this genre, but few works have attempted a definition of the term or an analysis of the mechanics or techniques employed. Mary Lascelles, in her study Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, has remarked that "tragicomedy has suffered in estimation from careless study and incomplete understanding".[3] While there are several studies of the history of the term, none of these touch upon the modern concept of the term.[4] There are, however, four major works which deal with the modern tragicomedy. Eric Bentley devotes a chapter to tragicomedy in The Life of Drama but applies a Renaissance concept of the term to modern plays. Cyrus Hoy, in The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy and Tragicomedy, aims at showing that all three of these genres rest upon a common principle, but he does not analyze tragicomedy as an independent genre. J. L. Styan's The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragicomedy, while discussing many recent tragicomedies and examining the blending of the comic and tragic within them, similarly devotes little attention to the theory of the genre. The most adequate and systematic discussion of the theoretical aspects of tragicomedy is found in Karl S. Guthke's work, Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre. These works, however, have in various ways supplied valuable material and insight into the genre. This thesis, by analyzing the interaction between the aesthetic framework and the genre,

is an attempt to provide new perspective into the nature of tragicomedy as it is practiced today.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jean Anouilh, Dinner with the Family, trans. Edward Owen Marsh (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. 58.

[2]Philip Thomson, The Grotesque, The Critical Idiom series, No. 24, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen and Co., 1972), p. 28.

[3]Mary Lascelles, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure (London: Athlone Press, 1955), p. 157.

[4]Marvin T. Herrick, Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France, and England, Illinois Studies in Lang. and Lit., Vol. 39 (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1955). See also Frank H. Ristine, English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963) and Henry Carrington Lancaster, The French Tragi-Comedy: Its Origin and Development from 1552 to 1628 (New York: Gordon Press, 1966).

CHAPTER I

THE TERM AND CONCEPT 'TRAGICOMEDY': A HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Tragicomedy first appeared during the time of Ancient Greek and Roman drama. The theatre was experiencing a "golden age"; comedy and tragedy were dominant forms, widely practiced and discussed. The interest in dramatic form contributed to experimentation and variations on traditional models which led to many varieties of mixed drama. Before the term tragicomedy itself was employed, there were indications of an inclination towards such a form in the drama. Two hybrid forms, hilarotragoidia and spoudaigeloion, were each based upon the idea of mixing elements of tragedy with those of comedy. The hilarotragoidia was a parody or burlesque of tragedy and myth by mingling elements of each into ultimately farcical sketches.[1] The spoudaigeloion was a serio-comic form used to convey a serious message through a humorous medium.[2] This was a direct outgrowth of Greek philosophy which appears to have admitted a combination of the serious and the gay, particularly as a didactic technique in which good-natured laughter assumes a moral purpose. Plato had incorporated such a perspective into many of his works on the assumption that laughter renders the serious more easily intelligible. In the Laws he defined the function of laughter as refreshing the mind by interrupting earnestness, or as a means to understanding serious things.[3] Statements in Phaedrus[4] and the Symposium refer to the seriousness of laughter.[5] In the Republic life is a game not worth taking seriously.[6] Man is a miracle of the gods, whether created in play or seriously (Laws).[7] Existence is then a mixture

of sorrow and joy, comedy and tragedy (Philebus).[8] The Symposium concludes in a serio-comic vein with an observation on the affinity between comedy and tragedy:

> . . . the chief thing which he remembered was Socrates compelling the other two to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also. To this they were constrained to assent, being drowsy, and not quite following the argument.[9]

The serio-comic mode was well-represented in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition, being discussed and employed not only by Plato, but by Aristotle, Rhetoric,[10] by Terence, Plautus and Horace to name only a few outstanding examples.

The mixing of elements in drama is discussed by Aristotle in chapter thirteen of the Poetics, a practice which he does not applaud but which he acknowledges because of its popularity.

> 7. In the second rank comes the kind of tragedy which some place first. Like the Odyssey, it has a double thread of plot, and also an opposite catastrophe for the good and for the bad. It is accounted the best because of the weakness of the spectators; for the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience.
> 8. The pleasure, however, thence derived is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies--like Orestes and Aegisthus --quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one stays or is slain.[11]

The distinction between comedy and tragedy implicit within this quotation is one according to the ending, the pleasure or quality of comedy being the reconciliation or happy ending. This type of tragic drama, the double issue play featuring a happy outcome, is used in Iphigenia by Euripides. Such a pattern was to be widely practised in the Renaissance and labelled as tragicomedy.

The Roman writer Horace also discusses mixed plays, but he distinguishes between comedy and tragedy according to style or level of diction. The mixed play is one in which the high style characteristic of tragedy is mixed with low diction, an attribute of comedy. While the Ars Poetica was not intended as a defense of hybrid dramatic forms, asserting that: "A subject for comedy refuses to be handled in tragic verse,"[12] several of Horace's statements are tolerant of some violation of form. Horace placed the pleasure of the audience before purity of style: "It is not enough for poems to be fine; they must charm and draw the mind of the listener at will."[13] Emphasizing the function of drama, the qualities of entertainment and effect, Horace could condone some mingling of the features of comedy and tragedy.

> At times, however, even Chremes rants and raves; often too, in a tragedy Telephus of Peleus utters his sorrow in the language of prose, when, poor and in exile, he flings aside his paint-pots and his words a yard long, in eagerness to touch the spectator's heart with his lamentable tale.[14]

The form of the satyr plays, as discussed by Horace, is another example of mixed drama. It stood nearer to tragedy but was conducive to mirth, embracing both the ludicrous and the serious within the action of the play. This is the form of that variety of tragicomedy to be introduced by Giambattista Guarini in the latter part of the Renaissance. The notion of the tetralogy itself insinuates the concept of mingling tragedy and comedy. Tragedies were written as trilogies but any submission to the civic contests in order to be considered complete was expected to contain a satyr play as the fourth piece.

The examples mentioned thus far indicate tendencies towards accommodating mixed drama in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition. Out of

such a context the tragicomedy appeared. The first known use of the term tragicomedy is a question not completely settled. General agreement attributes the term to the Roman playwright Plautus, who used it in the play Amphitryon. The literary historian, Frank Ristine, however, maintains that Plautus no more invented the term than he was the first to mix the two genres.[15] The term, Ristine argues, was coined by Greek comic poets preceding Plautus. He cites evidence which suggests that a Middle comedy writer, Anaxandrides, wrote a play entitled Comaedotragaedia, and that the term was used again by later Athenian playwrights. How they understood the term, however, is not known, but we do know that Plautus used it to designate a play which mingled high and low personages--gods, kings and slaves. The god Mercury addresses the audience in the prologue:

> What? frowning because I said this was to be a tragedy? I'll transform it. I'll convert this same play from tragedy to comedy. Of course it would never do for me to make it a comedy, out and out with kings and gods on the boards. How about it then? Well, in view of the fact that there is a slave part in it, I shall do just as I said and make it a tragicomedy.[16]

The term is, of course, used facetiously, and this, in fact, is indicative of the general indifference paid to tragicomedy at this time. While the idea of mixed drama and of some form of tragicomedy existed, tragicomedy in the drama of Graeco-Roman period was never so established a genre as either comedy or tragedy. Although a concept of tragicomedy was accommodated, it never received sufficient attention by either scholars or the playwrights to develop into a significant and distinct genre. Tragicomedy remained a secondary form, developing from the many hybrid varieties of drama that flourished at this time. It was not until the Renaissance that tragicomedy became a fully defined genre.

In the sixteenth century the term tragicomedy came into

prominence, being widely practiced and discussed in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and England. The term was eagerly adopted by Humanist and Renaissance scholars as a convenient label sanctifying their practice of mixed plays. The concept of tragicomedy in the sixteenth century, then, is one in accord with their heritage, rather than with that of the ancients.

The Renaissance had inherited the Medieval tradition of Miracle, Mystery and Morality plays. These plays, with their essentially didactic purpose, had the form of a serious action crowned with a happy ending, emphasizing the joyful, spiritual dénouement of tragedy averted. Sacred drama in the Middle Ages was becoming increasingly secularized with elements of the comic, the ludicrous and the familiar being introduced into the serious themes. Medieval taste, naive of the dramatic decorum established by the Ancients, incorporated these various secular interests into the structure of religious drama, mingling not only serious and comic incidents, but mixing high and low personages as well. This, in fact, was necessitated by the fabula of the plays which, taken from Biblical episodes or sacred legends, found deities frequently associating with common men. Thus drama in this period was primarily sacred, with a happy dénouement and containing a substantial number of secular elements. With the discovery of the Greek and Roman classics, and their subsequent impact, theoreticians and playwrights were split into two groups: those who sought to imitate the Ancients; and those who continued the Medieval heritage. A debate arose between those scholars demanding the Aristotelian purity of form and defenders of the established mixed drama. The latter group, seeking sanction for their practice, also looked to the classics for justification. Precedents were found in Euripides, Horace, the examples

of Greek mixed drama, and the label so conveniently contributed by Plautus. The term "tragicomedy" was then applied to denote the prevalent type of religious drama with the serious theme and happy ending. The early Renaissance did not really attempt to imitate classical mixed drama nor Plautian tragicomedy, but used them only as authoritative referents. The term "tragicomedy" was used more to license the practice than as a model.

The contact with the classics did, however, serve to refine some of the elements of the Medieval tradition, removing the miraculous and ribald, thus bringing the hybrid forms into stricter adherence to neoclassical rules. By the mid-seventeenth century the term tragicomedy was being applied to any play mixing characters, incidents and styles. This was the form of that "mongrel tragicomedy . . . neither right tragedies nor right comedies" censored by Sir Philip Sidney for mingling "Kings and clowns" and matching "hornpipes and funerals".[17] The decisive criterion, however, was upon the ending of the play. The native heritage developed into the form of tragicomedy in which a serious or potentially tragic play ends happily. This was the most conspicuous feature of tragicomedy in France, England, Germany and Italy.[18] It was, in fact, to such a form that the term "tragicomedy" was first applied in the Renaissance. It was used in the play Fernandus Servatus (1493) by Carlo and Marcellino Verardi. While Plautus is cited as an authoritative referent, the defense used in the subtitle is not that of Mercury but: "because the dignity of the persons and that impious violation of the royal majesty seem to belong to tragedy, the favorable outcome, on the other hand, (belongs) to comedy."[19]

With the play, Pastor Fido (1585), Giambattista Guarini introduced a new form of tragicomedy, the pastoral. Rather than mix the

extremes of comedy or tragedy, or use the form of the neoclassic tragedy with the deus ex machina happy ending, Guarini presented a mixture in which the elements are tempered. The form is not so much a "hybrid" but rather a more harmonious combination of mild action, situations and incidents. The dramatis personae, shepherds, satyrs and nymphs, are not really from either comedy or tragedy. Although the play was very popular, it was heavily criticized as usurping the Aristotelian and Ancient tradition which recognized only tragedy and comedy as pure and proper forms. To vindicate the play from the vigorous attacks laid upon it, Guarini composed a defense of tragicomedy, The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry (1599), which had far greater effect than that of his play. Guarini's argument is essentially that of Horace, of the primacy of the appeal to the audience. He cites as well the classical practice of mixed plays and is one of the first to quote chapter thirteen of the Poetics as a counter argument. Guarini's apology for tragicomedy became extremely popular and was the most famous theory of this genre in the Renaissance. Its effect was felt throughout Europe, and the two most prominent tragicomedians of this later stage, Fletcher and Beaumont, profited a great deal by Guarini's example.[20] However, even this later form of tragicomedy benefitted from classical theory essentially only in terms of sanction In general, classical theory did little to alter the form of the Renaissance mixed play. As was suggested earlier, its influence was more as a precedent than prototype.

The concept of tragicomedy, then, may be traced as having grown out of Greek philosophy and drama which accommodated a variety of oxymoronic concepts of which tragicomedy was merely one member. At this time, it was not a very significant nor dominant force. The conditions

of Renaissance drama made it convenient to employ the term "tragicomedy" for its own purpose, refining tragicomedy into an independent genre and popularizing it as a respectable and very prevalent form of drama. In the early period of the Renaissance, the label "tragicomedy" was applied to a play having one or more of the following characteristics: the mixing of noble and common personages ("kings and clowns"); the mingling of comic with tragic incidents, i.e., gaiety and disaster ("hornpipes and funerals"); the combining of high style and low style; and, most common, the fixing of a happy dénouement onto a tragedy. In the later stages, with Guarini, Fletcher and Beaumont for example, the concept of tragicomedy becomes that of a somewhat intermediate form, occupying a middle ground between tragedy and comedy. This becomes the most established and prevalent notion of the term. Modified features of both comedy and tragedy are employed, avoiding any extremes. It is a middle genre, not quite comedy nor true tragedy. This attitude is apparent in Guarini's statement:

> He who composes tragicomedy takes from tragedy its great personages, but not its great action, its verisimilar plot but not its true one, its movement of the feelings but not its disturbance of them, its pleasure but not its sadness, its danger but not its death; from comedy it takes laughter that is not excessive, modest amusement, feigned difficulty, happy reversal, and above all the comic order. . . . These components, thus managed, can stand together in a single story. . . .[21]

Such a view of tragicomedy as a mixture of diluted comedy and tragedy is echoed in Fletcher's Preface to the Faithful Shepherdess:

> . . . a tragi-comedie is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neere it, which is inough to make it no comedie.[22]

Schematically presented, if tragedy and comedy each formed one end of a continuum, the later tragicomedy would be composed of those

elements nearer the middle, being more grey than a mixture of black and white. By the end of the seventeenth century the term tragicomedy has fallen into disrepute and is no longer employed.[23] The form, however, is continued by varieties of middle drama. In England the sentimental comedy and the domestic tragedy and in France the drame and the mélodrame continued to obscure the traditional boundary between comedy and tragedy. It was this form of drama that dominated the European stage up until the birth of the period known as Modernism.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Dictionary of World Literature: Criticisms Forms Techniques, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943), p. 488.

[2]Lawrence Giagrande, "The Use of Spoudaigeloion in Greek and Roman Literature," Diss. St. Louis, 1961, p. 3.

[3]Laws 816c.

[4]Phaedrus 234d.

[5]Symposium 197e.

[6]Republic 388e.

[7]Laws 644d.

[8]Philebus 50.

[9]Works of Plato abridged, trans. B. Jowett, 3rd ed., ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1920), p. 374.

[10]Rhetoric 3.18.1419b3.

[11]Poetics XIII.7.

[12]Horace, "Art of Poetry," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit: Wayne State, 1962), p. 131.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Frank H. Ristine, English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), pp. 8-9.

[16]Plautus, "Amphitryon," The Loeb Classical Library: Plautus, I, trans. Paul Nixon (London: Heinemann, 1916), p. 11.

[17]Sir Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesie" in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 451.

[18]Marvin T. Herrick, Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France and England (Urbana: University of Illinois P., 1955), p. 91.

[19]Carlo and Marcellino Verardi, "Fernandus Servantus," quoted in Karl S. Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 14.

[20]Eugene M. Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1952), p. 46.

[21]Giambattista Guarini, "The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 511.

[22]John Fletcher, "Preface to The Faithful Shepherdess," quoted in Drama: The Major Genres, ed. Robert Hogan and Sven E. Molin (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962), p. 335.

[23]Herrick, op. cit., pp. 317-19.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The most established form of tragicomedy prior to the twentieth century was developed in the Renaissance. The most decisive and distinctive characteristic of tragicomedy at this time was either that of: (1) a tragedy with a happy ending; or (2) a form belonging legitimately to neither comedy nor tragedy but being a middle or bastard genre. In approaching the plays labelled as tragicomedy today, however, neither of these two definitions seems either adequate or appropriate. The gamut of modern tragicomedy, ranging from O'Casey to Beckett, suggests that a new concept of tragicomedy has been incorporated. J. L. Styan writing on contemporary dramatic convention notes that: "We can no more judge a modern tragedy by the standards we might apply to Greek tragedy than we could comfortably wear a suit of armour in an underground railway."[1] So too are traditional definitions of the dramatic genres no longer suitable nor accurate in describing the modern varieties. While an awareness of the historical development of the term and of the concepts of tragicomedy is important, its value lies primarily in understanding modern tragicomedy in terms of what it is not. It provides a contrast against which modern tragicomedy may be most clearly perceived as a phenomenon unique to the contemporary world. A new theory of tragicomedy, one which defines this modern phenomenon, is therefore required.

Despite this fact, however, there are still some influential critics today who apply the Renaissance concepts of tragicomedy when discussing modern tragicomic plays. Eric Bentley suggests that tragicomedy

is either tragedy transcended, or more common today, comedy with an unhappy ending.[2] The O. E. D. uses the latter criterion when it defines tragicomedy as "containing both tragic and comic elements" or "a play mainly of tragic character, but with a happy ending".[3] Marvin T. Herrick understands recent drama as occupying "a middle ground between tragedy and comedy",[4] continuing the concept of tragicomedy as an intermediate genre. Ruby Cohn associates Sidney's concept of the "mungrell Tragy-comedie" with Beckett's tragicomedy Waiting for Godot.[5] In his work on Sean O'Casey, David Krause calls it "the bastard muse".[6] Tragicomedy is understood as an impure form, neither right tragedy nor real comedy. This definition is echoed in the recent Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre which lists tragicomedy as a subform of tragedy, as a form not quite qualifying as full-measure tragedy: "In the twentieth century there have been few attempts at tragedy proper; more consonant with the mood of the time seem to be domestic and social drama with tragic overtones or mixed media such as the tragi-comedy."[7] The critic John Gassner writes: "The same deflationary sensibility which weakened tragic art favored the development of the other, intermediate forms of drama. We may observe this development in a modern sort of tragicomedy or 'dark' comedy, with as wide a range as that spanned by Uncle Vanya and Juno and the Paycock."[8]

Whereas these definitions perpetuate the view of tragicomedy as occupying a middle ground, the majority of modern critics and playwrights see it as a ground common to both tragedy and comedy. It is perhaps this premise which distinguishes the modern concept of tragicomedy from its predecessors. The one theme common to all earlier notions of tragicomedy was that of the fundamental distinction between comedy and tragedy. In the theories of drama from the ancients until recently, there is an almost

unanimous acceptance of a basic antithesis between comedy and tragedy. Drama is either one or the other, or if elements of both are found within one action, they are each independent of the other. In The Art of Drama the critic Ronald Peacock neatly summarizes this conviction: "In the midst of more intricate details of aesthetic analysis it is well to state a simple truth: drama must be one of two things: either comic or intensely moving."[9] The modern view of tragicomedy, on the other hand, seems to challenge or even reject the idea that elements of the comedy and the tragedy are incongruent or that they are mutually incompatible. James Thurber notes: "Many dictionaries, including the O. E. D., wrongly hyphenate tragicomedy, as if the two integral parts were warring elements that must be separated."[10] Ionesco echoes this defiance of the traditional demarcation when he declares his intention: "to confront comedy and tragedy in order to link them in a new dramatic synthesis" or to convey "the tragedy of comedy".[11]

Based on this idea of the fundamental identity of comedy and tragedy, the concept of tragicomedy as a composite or synthetic genre seems to define the modern attitude towards this genre. In his book Modern Tragicomedy, Guthke argues that "the comic and the tragic are identical and mutual conditions of each other",[12] emphasizing that this condition of reciprocity is the trademark of tragicomedy as a modern phenomenon. Sean O'Casey, a contemporary writer of tragicomedy, has written:

> As for blending "Comedy with Tragedy" it's no new practice--hundreds have done it, including Shakespeare up to Dion Boucicault . . . . And, indeed, Life is always doing it, doing it, doing it. Even where one lies dead, laughter is often heard in the next room. There's no tragedy that isn't tinged with humour, no comedy, that hasn't its share of tragedy--if one has eyes to see, ears to hear.[13]

The notion of tragicomedy as "better expressing the course of the world" by containing both comedy and tragedy is also found in Guarini's argument,[14] and within both Dryden's[15] and Dr. Johnson's[16] defense of Shakespeare as appealing from rule to nature. The essential difference, however, lies in the fact that it is only in the modern age that the notion of the reciprocity between comedy and tragedy is fundamental to the concept of tragicomedy. Indeed, the mutuality of comedy and tragedy is so emphasized that many writers express an inability to distinguish between them. Charlotte Spivack finds comedy in all tragedy,[17] and the playwright Jack Richardson sees tragedy in modern comedy.[18] Durrenmatt writes that while tragedy is no longer possible "we can achieve the tragic out of comedy. We can bring it forth as an abyss that opens suddenly; indeed many of Shakespeare's tragedies are already comedies out of which the tragic arises."[19] The blurring of the traditional boundaries becomes the dominant focus in the twentieth century. As one contemporary critic notes: "Taking a glance at modern literature, we discover that the very basis of comedy is tragic; indeed, the modern playwright no longer cares to separate his worlds into tragedy or comedy, but prefers to use the term tragicomedy or, like Brecht, omit any designation altogether."[20]

The affinity or confusion between comedy and tragedy is a prevalent phenomenon, and the loss of the very distinction is echoed in the statements by playwrights, critics and even creators of comic strips.[21] The writer Christopher Fry notes:

> . . . when I set about writing a comedy the idea presents itself first of all as tragedy. The characters press on to the theme with all their divisions and perplexities heavy about them; they are already entered for the race to doom, and good and evil are an infernal tangle skinning the fingers that try to unravel them. If the characters were not qualified for tragedy there would be

> no comedy, and to some extent I have to cross the one before I can light on the other. In a century less flayed and quivering we might reach it more directly; but not now, unless every word we write is going to mock us.[22]

The inability to distinguish any formal differences between comedy and tragedy has significant implications for a theory of tragicomedy. Many traditional definitions of comedy and tragedy become unacceptable or irrelevant to an understanding of modern tragicomedy. George Bernard Shaw had defined tragedy as "heavy drama in which everyone is killed in the last act, comedy being light in which everyone is married in the last act".[23] In modern drama terms such as "heavy" or "light" are not indicative of any one genre, nor is death connected exclusively with tragedy, or marriage with comedy. As Guthke has observed, it has not been possible to use any such criteria to distinguish between the comic or the tragic, nor others such as appeal to the mind or the heart, or to view one as the realm of immanence and the other of transcendence.[24] It is possible to cite equally sound examples to contradict each such position. Even the notion of comedy as "painless" and tragedy as "painful" are unreliable. Ionesco remarks: "as far as I am concerned, I have never been able to understand the difference that is made between the comic and the tragic. As the comic is the intuition of the absurd, it seems to me more conducive to despair, than the tragic. The comic offers no way out."[25]

The lack of any determining morphological elements, of any structural characteristics consistently unique to either comedy, tragedy or tragicomedy by which they may be identified, is further supported by the history of these genres. As has been indicated, the concepts of each have undergone great modifications, being influenced and shaped by the

conventions of each period in its history. There has been no formal constant throughout the ages nor any particular theme, situation or character especially compatible or sui generis to these genres. These elements by themselves are neutral. That is, without any antecedent or precipitating context, the device--whether it be marriage, death, a rise or a fall--has no valence attached. Either can be treated either way for the morphological elements contain no inherent valency.

Hence, to avoid the "formalistic fallacy" which equates form and function, the approach taken will be to view tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy in terms of the function or effect of the elements. Each element has a particular effect within a given context. Friedrich von Schiller suggested one aspect of this when he wrote that what makes the subject matter tragic or comic is "not the sphere from which the subject is drawn, but the forum before which the poet brings it".[26] It is, however, necessary to consider not only the forum before which the work is brought, but the form in which it is brought, i.e., the way in which the elements are organized by the author. A play may be seen as a large signalling system in which each action (from verbal to gestural) and each object (from actor to prop) act as signs.[27]

The sign is assigned a value, both by its socio-cultural significance for the audience and by the playwright who places it within a certain context. The choice of this context depend upon his interpretation of the sign which is filtered through his personal view. View and value thus determine how an audience perceives the situation.[28] The way in which the artist shapes and orders the elements determines the effect. A discussion of tragicomedy as genre, then, must analyze how the effect is created--that is, how the signs are organized for the play to function

as a tragicomedy.

In defining this genre, without such recourse to any formal constants, it is valuable to consider the very nature of drama. Cyrus Hoy, in The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy and Tragicomedy bases his work upon the hypothesis that an identical principle underlies comedy, tragedy and the tragicomedy: the incongruity in the human condition, the discrepancy between noble intentions and ignoble deed, between the real and the ideal.[29]

This, however, is only one possibility, for all comedies, tragedies and tragicomedies have at their basis an incompatibility or clash. There is always a basic incompatibility which creates the basis of drama--conflict. The lowest common denominator of all drama is that of deviation. Drama arises from such an index of incongruity, occurring as the deviation from the established norm (whether between expectation and consequence or reality and illusion). The created world of the play is based upon a certain order and this becomes the standard. Each dramatic text has its own criteria--systems of values, laws and boundaries --which, being finite and fixed (within the framework of the play) serve as the basic norms consistent within that work. The plot of both comedy and tragedy is the violation of this order. This generates opposition between the two facts which creates dramatic tension. The polarity or resistance is usually caused by the action of the hero, whether comic or tragic, acting in contradiction to the norm. Thus the conflict is structured upon the fact that relative to the world order within the text, the hero does not fit. This is true for tragedy, comedy, and ultimately for tragicomedy.

The incongruity between the hero and his world depends, therefore,

upon the perspective taken (the view and value of the context) in order to be interpreted as either comedy or tragedy. The situation is similar to that of the black keys on a keyboard, which by themselves are neutral, but rely upon the context (going up or down the scale) in order to be understood as sharp or flat. If this is so, can it not be possible to view the same incongruity as being both comic and tragic? The answer of the modern critic has been definitely affirmative, and the practice of the playwright has substantiated this view. As the comic and the tragic spring from an identical source, and depend upon a matter of perspective, the two may be identified and experienced simultaneously. Everyday life confirms this experience, when the same incident appears both tragic and syncronously comic. The critic Walter Kerr proposes that: "There is no act in life that is not, when it is seen whole, both tragic and comic at once."[30]

In the modern tragicomic fusion, the one does not serve to neutralize or cancel out the other, nor does it distract, as in the technique of comic relief. The principle of comic relief alternates a tragic incident with a comic one, each designed to be independent of the other. The comic scene is an interlude and the audience is not to transpose the comic tone onto the tragic action nor to confuse the mood created by each. Modern tragicomedy, however, seeks the very opposite effect--to superimpose, relate and integrate the two. It engages opposing effects to evoke simultaneously opposing reactions within the audience, creating a heightened sensitivity rather than a neutral or diminished response to the action onstage. The effect of the one is intensified by the presence of the other which reciprocally brings the other into sharper focus. The effect is "redoubled". G. Wilson Knight, in his analysis of this

phenomenon, finds that:

> The comic and the tragic rest both on the idea of incompatibilities, and are also, themselves, mutually exclusive: Therefore, to mingle them is to add to the meaning of each: for the result is then but a new sublime incongruity.[31]

The comic does not alleviate the tragic effect, but, rather, renders it more acute, emphasizing the pathos in tragedy. Tragedy likewise brings out the poignancy in comedy. The effect of tragicomedy is based upon the interdependence of the comic and tragic, or rather their interaction. The reciprocity of the interaction is essential. Integration of the two is the prerequisite of the tragicomic effect; as Guthke writes:

> . . . the tragic and the comic are here not only simultaneous and identical, but also . . . heighten each other. That is: on the one hand, the tragic implication adds poignancy to the comic in giving it more depth or more obstacles to be "overcome" by laughter, making the comic incongruity all the more appreciable for its increased crassness. On the other hand, the undeniably comic constellation adds acumen to the bitterness of tragedy. And both kinds of interaction happen at once, depend upon each other, and progressively and mutually increase each other.[32]

Thus, not only is it possible to fuse two mutually hostile reactions into one synthetic response, but each reaction may act as the context for the other, creating what I shall term resonance. While Guthke insists that there is a simultaneous synthesis of the comic and the tragic[33] and Mandel argues that there can only be an extremely rapid almost indistinguishable oscillation between the two,[34] either perspective points to the effect of resonance with the reciprocity of the comic and tragic in the tragicomic fusion, each acts to heighten the other, and the continued reverberation of this stimulus in the emotions or response of the audience is resonance.

There are primarily three different ways in which the tragicomic effect may be produced. In every case it is the context that conditions the response. The first is that of ambivalence in which a context is so shaped so as to evoke two opposite reactions to one sign or series of signs. One activity is assigned two values and is perceived from two views. This technique operates with the image of the tormented bums in Beckett's Waiting for Godot and in Andreyev's presentation of the clown in He Who Gets Slapped. Mrs. Foran's remark at the end of Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie is another effective example.

A second possibility is that of alternating comic and tragic signs so that each one comments upon the other. The one does not distract from but emphasizes the effect of the other. This creates a kaleidoscope effect suggested by O'Casey. "A jewel moved about in the hand shows many flashes of light and colour"; he writes, "and the human life moved about by circumstances of tragedy and comedy shows more than many flashes of diversity in the unity of its many-sided nature".[35] The seemingly random choice of details that are found in the naturalistic play function to create such a tragicomic kaleidoscope. Each detail illuminates a comic or tragic aspect. A gesture or activity can serve to undercut or heighten the effect of the words by providing an opposite interpretation. Even when organically unrelated, as in the oblique spatial juxtaposition, spatial simultaneity connects diverse elements. Parallel conversations or activity on another part of the stage are potentially interrelated. Figure and setting could contradict each other, or activity and mood. Another example is the use of music by O'Casey and Chekhov in which a gay song contradicts the sad circumstances and provides deeper insight into the situation. This technique of juxtaposition achieves particularly

intense effect in the grotesque tragicomedy. In O'Casey's The Silver Tassie and Durrenmatt's The Visit the juxtaposing of symbols of life and death, fertility and impotence creates a very emphatic tragicomic effect.

The third possibility is to blur the tragic and the comic so that, rather than experiencing both, the spectator is bewildered, bemused and is unable to distinguish either. This effect is often created by not establishing some clearly defined standard within the text, and/or by creating a confusing context. The spectator becomes disoriented, because lacking security in norms, he is similarly unable to identify or interpret the signs and their value as intended within the play. Similarly the sign may be deceptive, as when a precipitating context is created for one sign, but another sign occurs, thus contradicting expectation.

Many writers have juxtaposed the historical context of a sign against its meaning in the play to achieve a tragicomic effect. This can be done particularly in cases in which a certain sign has a particular valence attached to it traditionally within the culture. The use of a circus as the setting for a tragedy is one such example, used effectively by Andreyev in his play He Who Gets Slapped. Samuel Beckett upsets traditional symbols in his play, Waiting for Godot, in which comic devices such as the pratfall, and other comic routines, take on serious implications. Similarly a traditionally serious realm may be used farcically: philosophy in Andreyev's play, and theology in that of Beckett's, are subject to comic treatment. The clear-cut demarcation of reactions which Ronald Peacock proposed becomes impossible.

Thus we have seen that tragicomedy requires some reciprocity between its two component elements, either in alternation or fusion or by creating an effect of ambiguity. It must also be noted that in order to

have a tragicomedy, this reciprocity must be contained within the entire play, not just at certain moments, as in many of Shakespeare's plays, or only at the end, as Bentley suggests.[36] The entire play must be based on such mutuality. It is upon such a notion of reciprocity that the definition of modern tragicomedy must be based. Thus, tragicomedy as it occurs today may be defined as the integration of comic and tragic elements in such a way that they interact with each other throughout the progression of the play so as to produce a corresponding effect (vision) within the audience. This is, of course, a very general delimitation of this genre and is proposed only as a working definition. From this basis the actual analysis of the role of the aesthetic frameworks can proceed with a view towards establishing a more precise understanding of how tragicomedy functions.

FOOTNOTES

[1]J. L. Styan, Elements of Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1960), p. 254.

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[3]Oxford English Dictionary, XI (London: Oxford U. P., 1961), p. 232.

[4]Marvin T. Herrick, Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France and England, Illinois Studies in Lang. and Lit., Vol. 39 (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1955), p. 321.

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[6]David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967), p. 47.

[7]John Russell Taylor, The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 278.

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[10]James Thurber, "The Case for Comedy," The Atlantic Monthly, Nov., 1960, p. 98.

[11]Eugene Ionesco, Notes and Counter-Notes: Writings on the Theatre, tr. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 27.

[12]Karl S. Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 59.

[13]Sean O'Casey from "Letters to a Randolph-Macon Senior," rpt. in Drama: The Major Genres, ed. Robert Hogan and Sven E. Molin (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962), p. 340.

[14]Giambattista Guarini, "The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. and trans. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit: Wayne State U. P., 1962), p. 509.

[15]John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, pp. 637-38.

[16]Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare," rpt. in Drama: The Major Genres, p. 339.

[17]Charlotte Spivack, "Tragedy and Comedy: A Metaphysical Wedding," Bucknell Review, IX (1960), p. 223.

[18]Jack Richardson, "Preface to Gallows Humour" (New York: Dutton, 1961).

[19]Friedrich Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," The Modern Theatre: Readings and Documents, ed. Daniel Seltzer (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 67.

[20]Adolf D. Klarmann, "Friedrich Durrenmatt and the Tragic Sense of Comedy," Tulane Drama Review, IV, No. 4 (1960), p. 77.

[21]Gary Trudeau, "Maggie and Jiggs and Blondie and Dagwood and Lucy and Charlie," Couples, prepared by the editors of New York Magazine (New York: New York Magazine Press, 1973), p. 32.

[22]Christopher Fry, "Comedy," The Modern Theatre: Readings and Documents, pp. 24-25.

[23]George Bernard Shaw, "Tolstoy: Tragedian or Comedian," The London Mercury, IV, p. 31, quoted in Guthke, op. cit., p. 7.

[24]Guthke, op. cit., p. 49.

[25]Ionesco, op. cit., p. 27.

[26]Friedrich von Schiller, "Naive and Sentimental Poetry" and "On the Sublime," trans. Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), p. 122.

[27]Jiří Veltruský, "Man and Object in the Theatre," A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style, ed. and trans. Paul L. Garvin (Washington: Georgetown U. P., 1964), p. 83.

[28]Robert W. Corrigan, "Comedy and the Comic Spirit," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. R. W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 8.

[29]Cyrus Hoy, The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy and Tragicomedy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 5.

[30]Walter Kerr, Tragedy and Comedy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), p. 28.

[31]G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 160.

[32]Guthke, op. cit., p. 57.

[33]Guthke, loc. cit.

[34]Oscar Mandel, "What's So Funny: The Nature of the Comic," The Antioch Review, XXX, Spring (1970), p. 78.

[35]Sean O'Casey, The Green Crow (New York: George Braziller, 1956), p. 182.

[36]Bentley, op. cit., p. 319.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURALISTIC TRAGICOMEDY

The term "naturalism" is generally preferred to "realism" to designate that dramatic convention which strives to present the illusion of "a slice of life" on the stage. This term was also applied to that type of nineteenth century novel in France which, incorporating the biological theories of Darwin and the determinism of Taine, traced the social or environmental and biological influences upon man. The use of this term in drama criticism, however, does not necessarily imply concern with these doctrines, but refers to a style which strives to be life-like not only in what is being depicted but in the method of depiction as well. Such attempts at verisimilitude then, were contingent upon: (1) the domain of objects used, i.e., choice of story stuff, incident, character, etc.; and (2) the method of presentation, i.e., attention to detail, incorporation of colloquial language.

The choice of the story source and the plot/story (sujet/fabula) ratio in a naturalist play emphasizes the impression of continuity between life and stage.[1] In the plays to be discussed in this chapter, Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard and Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, the contemporary setting and the topical problems form an aesthetic framework familiar to the audience. This technique functions to blur the line between art and life. As Bernard Beckerman writes: "Realism and naturalism accustomed audiences to relate what they saw onstage to actuality. . . . In this frame of reference the microcosm onstage was a fragment of a larger life that went on in the nontheatrical world."[2] The

disintegration of the land-owning class and their estates in Russia and the civil strife in Ireland provide such touch-stones in these plays. There is little separation in time and/or space between the stage events and life offstage.

The illusion of being a "slice of life", of the continuity between life and stage, is further emphasized psychologically and aesthetically by the plot/story ratio. Story (fabula) is the basic material for the narrative, whereas plot (sujet) is the artistic selection and ordering of this material. Thus story (being the "what happens") seems to have broader significance than plot, because it implies events occurring not only in or during the play, but before and after, both onstage and offstage. The proportion between the plot and the story influences the verisimilitude of the play. If the ratio is one-to-one the play is more self-contained, and the distinction between play and life is emphasized. In naturalism, however, the story is larger than the plot and hence there is far more connection between onstage and offstage life, blurring the line between play and life. "By creating the illusion that the plot flows out of previous events into succeeding events (returning to life, as it were), naturalism reduces as much as possible the illusion of 'aesthetic distance'."[3] The endings of both Chekhov's and O'Casey's plays illustrate this. Despite the cutting down of the orchard, the end of an era or the break-down of a family unit, life continues. The Ranevsky household will resettle and continue. Similarly, Mary and Juno Boyle will also start a new life, and the Captain will persist in his old ways and manners. There is no suggestion of a termination in the action of the plays, and the audience is encouraged to look beyond the events.

The essential quality of both the domain of objects used and the method of presentation in the naturalistic play is that of typicality. It is essential that the fragment of life be representative with typical setting, activity, speech and characters, recognizable as authentic and plausible in terms of our everyday experience.

Typicality requires a total, three-dimensional representation. The composition of the dramatic background is important for conveying the illusion of "life as it is". The use of local colours and speech has already been mentioned as one aspect of this style. The actual stage set is also an important factor. It must be one familiar and typical to the audience.

> The three-dimensional interior of naturalism symbolizes a cross-section of actual existence, its choice reflecting the crucial importance of a particular locale in contemporary existence. It was eminently appropriate for a materialistic society to be lodged amidst domestic possessions. The living room and kitchen of naturalism, each in its own way, epitomized the background for the action.[4]

The use of real furniture and utensils in the set, rather than painted backcloth, further makes the production seem more real.

The choice of the action of the play also reflects everyday existence, portraying the ironies and incongruities of life. The little and great moments are mixed to make the scene more natural. Gestures, conversations and incidents are patterned so as to suggest natural activity and to camouflage the artificiality of the conventions. The tone is frequently more delicate, with less exaggerated emphasis placed upon either the heroic or the noble. This has been termed the domestication or "democratization of the heroic".[5] The emphasis upon the total picture, with its incorporation of the gay and the serious, the great and

the inconsequential, involves as well the creation of rounded, three-dimensional characters who could experience both the tragedy and the comedy of life. In the preface to Miss Julie (1888), Strindberg distinguished between the "automaton" and the "character".[6] The automaton was that kind of hero which inhabited plays before naturalism. Unchanging, fixed to a destiny, he is not taken from life. The character of naturalism is taken from life. His life is a conglomeration of past and present, sad and happy experience. He is an organism, ever-changing and growing. J. L. Styan labels this phenomenon the "chameleon character".[7]

The attention to the total representation (through the use of what the critic Skaftymov terms "the homely detail")[8] in the stage setting and characterization, the use of colloquial speech, and the domain of objects used functioned to promote verisimilitude. The emphasis upon authenticity and three-dimensional representation in presenting a cross-section of daily existence necessitated the incorporation of many colours or moods from the spectrum of life. The tragic and the comic sides of domestic life, the laughter and the tears, the serious and the gay moments must all be presented in order for the fragment to seem real. As O'Casey has written:

> In my opinion, the time has passed for a drama to devote its expression to one aspect of life alone, and to consider that aspect of life as dominant for the time the play takes to unfold itself; that in one play one aspect of life must be the beginning, the middle, and the end of it. Consistency of mood and of manner isn't always, indeed not even often, found in life and why should it then be demanded in a play?[9]

The fidelity to life, incorporating all the moods of a cross-section of daily life, involves a tragicomic perspective. The tragic and the comic moments are interrelated in the spectrum of existence, as in

O'Casey's metaphor of life as a jewel with "the many flashes of diversity in the unity of its many-sided nature".[10] Depicting such variegated moods and activities, Chekhov and O'Casey translated the tragicomedy of life into theatrical terms. The Cherry Orchard and Juno and the Paycock will be used to illustrate how tragicomedy has been realized within the framework of naturalism.

The Cherry Orchard depicts the disintegration of the land-owning aristocracy in Russia in the late nineteenth century. "All Russia is our orchard" observes the student Trofimov, giving symbolic meaning to the title of the play. The action is set on the Ranevsky estate. After five years abroad Madame Lyubov Ranevsky, a widow, and her seventeen-year-old daughter, Anya, return to the estate to find that it has been heavily mortgaged to pay for Lyubov's extravagances. It is May and the cherry orchard is in bloom, but they are told that in August the orchard must be sold to pay the interest on the mortgage. The prime project of the characters is to save the orchard and the play portrays how the various characters respond to this problem. Lyubov is shown as incapable of realizing her desperate situation. Her brother, Gaev, is equally unable to cope. He suggests some impractical solutions for keeping the estate, but his chief hope lies in an uncertain legacy or a rich marriage for Anya. The only apparently feasible proposal comes from Lopahin, a merchant whose father was once a serf of the Ranevsky family. He suggests cutting down the famous cherry orchard and dividing the land into plots for summer cottages. The idea of destroying such beauty is rejected as sacrilege, and with no specific plan in mind for saving the estate, the family drifts aimlessly but hopefully toward the day set for the auction. The relationships between the members of the household and their reaction

to the sale of the estate are the basic activities of the play. The focus is primarily upon the palpitations on the surface of life, the foibles and misunderstandings that make up daily existence.

All attempts and plans to avert the sale were unsuccessful. On the day of the auction, Lyubov gives a party she can ill afford. In the midst of the festivities Lopahin arrives and happily announces that he has acquired the estate, and soon will be cutting down the orchard. The estate and orchard gone, the family prepares to depart. It is now autumn. The household unit breaks up as everyone leaves to go their own ways. The young couples separate. Firs, the faithful servant, forgotten and left behind, remarks: "Life has slipped by as though I hadn't lived." As the curtain falls the strokes of the axe are heard in the orchard.

Like The Cherry Orchard, Juno and the Paycock, Sean O'Casey's three-act play, has a double setting. The chaotic postwar days of 1922 in Ireland, when the newly-created Free State was still terrorized by internal struggle, serve as a context for the immediate activity of the play: the life of the Boyle family in their tenement dwelling in Dublin. The indomitable mother, the mainstay of the family, is nicknamed after the Roman goddess because significant events in her life transpired in June. But unlike the bird sacred to the classical heroine, Juno Boyle's peacock is a "paycock", her parasitic husband, a strutting mock-heroic windbag. As the play begins, the family is in a bad financial position. Jack Boyle, the wastrel husband, spends his time in the "snug". Their daughter, Mary, has joined the workers strike, and Johnny, the son, is crippled "for Ireland" by a wounded hip and a lost arm, is sick and very edgy. References to the fighting, and particularly to the death of Robbie Tancred, a young neighbor with whom Johnny vehemently denies any friendship,

are very upsetting to him. The other members of the family try to comfort Mrs. Tancred but they are not deeply affected by the tragedy of her son's death. One of the reasons for their lack of empathy with Mrs. Tancred is that they are now rejoicing over news of an inheritance brought to them by Mary's new suitor, the lawyer Charles Bentham. The pattern of life in the Boyle family changes and they begin to accumulate, on credit, the garish trappings of prosperity. But the inheritance falls through, and Charlie goes off, leaving Mary pregnant, whereupon Jerry Devine, another suitor, turns from her. As the creditors arrive to carry off their furniture, Irish irregulars also arrive to take away Johnny, who, they have discovered, was the one who betrayed Robbie Tancred. When the police arrive to tell Juno that her son has been killed, she leaves to identify the body, now echoing Mrs. Tancred's lamentations. The Captain is left with Joxer, both of them extremely drunk and maudlin. As the curtain falls Boyle is saying: "I'm telling you . . . Joxer . . . th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis!"

The Cherry Orchard and Juno and the Paycock have been judged by modern critics to be tragicomedies par excellence. Both, however, have undergone a variety of interpretations, and their classification according to genre has proved elusive and problematic. Chekhov wrote that he intended The Cherry Orchard as a vaudeville or comedy.[11] Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko understood it rather as a tragedy. This latter perspective prevailed until the post World War II era, when critical opinion in the West swung to the opposite view, interpreting it again as comedy. Critics such as Magarshack,[12] Latham,[13] Silverstein,[14] and Gerould[15] revived Chekhov's protests and altered the picture of the gloomy, melancholy playwright to one wearing a smile. A third approach

has recently gained critical support--that of viewing the play as a tragicomedy.[16] This perspective incorporates the strengths of both earlier approaches and illuminates the depth and dimension of the play.

The situation is similar in the case of O'Casey's play. Juno and the Paycock has been understood both as tragedy[17] and as comedy.[18] The view of it as tragicomedy, however, seems more attractive to recent critics, revealing the dramatic artistry within the play and affording a more valuable perspective for understanding its complex nature.

The tragicomic movement of both The Cherry Orchard and Juno and the Paycock may be termed contrapuntal, focusing at one moment on a light or amusing aspect, then, by a slight shift, illuminating the dark side of the smile. Chekhov's tragicomedy does not emphasize either perspective, but employs a light touch, so that their combination is subdued and smooth rather than pronounced. Slight modulations of intensity and the subtle blending of laughter and tears is characteristic of Chekhov's tragicomic style. As a naturalist Chekhov chose typical or domestic material rather than "dramatic" incidents for his narrative. He sought a greater distribution of emphasis. There is no one clearly defined hero or tone in the play. By presenting a balance of emotions, by illuminating both sides (the sad and the gay) of a character or incident, he sought to avoid distortion. Similarly, his later plays lack violent action. Climactic events such as shootings, fights and quarrels are played down. "After all, in real life," Chekhov wrote, "people don't spend every minute shooting at each other, hanging themselves and making confessions of love. They don't spend all the time saying clever things. They're more occupied with eating, drinking, flirting and talking stupidities--and these are the things which ought to be shown on stage."[19]

With the inclusion of a wide range of activities, Chekhov's approach is more contextual than climactic. Rather than concentrate upon horizontal or linear development, Chekhov portrays the total pattern within the slice of life, integrating the high and low amplitudes, the trivial and the serious.

The contextual approach which assimilates diverse elements is conducive to the creation of the tragicomic effect. A balance between the comic and tragic elements is created largely through an illusion of simultaneity. Discussing The Cherry Orchard, one critic observes that Chekhov "brings together several strands of action on stage at one time and, by juggling them, manages to convey the sense of spatial relationship between one action and another."[20] These strands of action are usually of similarly slight intensity, thus no abrupt change is manifested. The comic blends into the tragic, or the two become superimposed upon one another without a concomitant violent swing in intensity. This factor, combined with the vertical (contextual) rather than horizontal (sequential) line of development produces that characteristic of Chekhov's tragicomedy labelled as "undramatic drama".

The tragicomic pattern in O'Casey's play is similarly realized through the contextual approach. The comic elements and the tragic ones form a context for each other, and become superimposed upon each other. The contrapuntal movement between the two effects not only creates a sequential or linear development, but interrelates them to give an illusion of simultaneity. As in Chekhov's work, the rhythm of change in O'Casey's play is steady and undulating. In the tradition of naturalness each action and mood flows into the next so that there is no irregularity or abrupt change, but gentle shifts. O'Casey's drama differs from

Chekhov's, however, in the manipulation of amplitude. O'Casey employs greater modulations of intensity. In Chekhov's plays the tragic ingredient is largely made up of pathos and sentimentality, reflecting the influence of the temper of eighteenth and nineteenth century drama. O'Casey's tragic elements are far more serious and poignant. Civil and national strife, death, and the breakdown of traditional institutions such as religion and the family unit, constitute some of the tragic themes woven into the play. While more serious, they are not, however, more pronounced than the comic or trivial side of domestic life, but seem an integral part of the rhythm of life. There are no irregular or violent swings of intensity. But because of the consequence of the themes, the impact upon the audience is greater than in Chekhov's play.

O'Casey's tragicomic pattern has been censured as mere melodrama, and the wide variety of moods and situations as a jumble of rather confused events. Joseph Wood Krutch reviewed Juno with the comment that O'Casey's plays

> . . . lack form, lack movement, and in the final analysis lack an informing purpose. They bustle with characters, generally amusing enough in themselves, but the series of sketches which go to make up one of his dramas is strung upon the skimpiest threat of melodramatic action, and though each of his plays has its moments neither of the two seen here [Juno and The Plough] produces any unified or lasting effect.[21]

However, unlike the melodrama with its pattern of irregular pressures and sudden eruptions, O'Casey's drama has a distinctive rhythm of gradual and steady intensification. In the first act of Juno a variety of moods, tones and activities is set in the domestic world of the tenement apartment. Allusions to death and war are made with the same intensity as to household topics. A chorus of tragicomic voices and

moods is created. Juno's witty sarcasms, the captain's songs, antics and chatter are intermingled with the references to the war and civil strife. As the action progresses, the comic and tragic themes become increasingly intense, bringing each other into sharper focus. The merriment and singing of the second act are repeatedly punctured by reminders of the war, as the background of the national tragedy is juxtaposed with the domestic comfort afforded by the expectation of the legacy. Themes (both tragic and comic) merely suggested in the first act, come progressively nearer to overt manifestation. The tragicomic effect becomes particularly intense by the last act. It becomes increasingly apparent that the comic "deus ex machina", the windfall of the will, has afforded no solution as it would have done in a traditional comedy, but has created tragic complication rather than release. The compounding of comic errors leads to progressively tragic results, and each new incident thus assumes tragicomic valence. There is no abrupt change in intensity, however, for each strand of activity is interrelated with the rest by presenting a new perspective on the preceding activity or mood as well as creating a context for the succeeding one. The various tones, either of revelry or pathos, become superimposed upon each other. The pattern is one of steady intensification, for each progressively intense tragic note blends into a comic tone of equal intensity. There is no rise and fall, but a progressive amplification of both the tragic and the ludicrous.

The amplification of intensity is created as the action moves from oblique to direct confrontation. The Cherry Orchard displays the avoidance of confrontation, and therefore the amplitude of intensity is relatively low. In Juno, however, the themes of death and war become increasingly overt in the play, being realized in the final act in Juno's

direct action or reactions. The tragic, however, does not become predominant, for there is no real concrete manifestation on the stage of the consequences of the war. The audience is aware of its existence as a force, but only indirectly, primarily through second-hand information. We are given hints and signs of the war (i.e., in the first act, Johnny's presence, his anxiety; in the second, his paranoia, the sounds of the funeral, and the ominous summons; in the third the news of his death), but no concrete evidence. The movement is from oblique to progressively direct conflict, but even with the barren apartment and Juno's prayer, the third act does not culminate in complete confrontation. The play ends in a note of comedy, counterpointing the direct tragic lament as the captain returns home drunk and oblivious. The action which promised tragic confrontation is dissipated into absurdity in Boyle's inability to face reality. The perspective has changed, but not the intensity, for the Captain's ludicrous response does not deflate the poignancy, but heightens it.

The use of mood or atmosphere is an important factor in contextual drama, and contributes to the sense of subtleness found in a naturalistic play. The naturalistic play, without recourse to theatrical exaggeration, relies upon mood to express the variegation of daily experiences and emotions while maintaining an air of casualness. The illusion of naturalness is retained through the use of the subtle innuendoes of mood, of suggestion rather than direct statement. Symbolism becomes important. The domain of objects, while simulating a natural environment, functions as well to create an atmosphere, to suggest the state of a situation or character. The attention to details is also instrumental in creating the symbolism, as each detail is a manifestation

of the inner life. The choice of setting, the rooms and the decor, are symbolic in both The Cherry Orchard and Juno and the Paycock. In each act of Juno the furnishings of the apartment are symptoms of the condition of the Boyle family. In this play the physical appearance of the characters is also emphasized as symbolizing their inner nature. The description of each of the characters in the stage directions is a detailed account of how his or her appearance, gesture, dress or habit of speech is a manifestation of inner qualities.

Chekhov too effectively employs gesture or intonation to communicate the inner feelings of the characters and this is frequently more important than the semantic content of their words.

Intonation or voice expression thus function for tragicomic effect by communicating a variety of moods. The critic Nils A. Nilsson, examining the role of intonation as expressing rhythmic variation, notes:

> . . . It is certainly true that the emotional scale Chekhov works with is of no very broad register. The poles do not lie very far from each other. But in the middle register he uses, Chekhov has been able to capture very subtle nuances. . . .
>
> In this middle register he works with perpetual changes and contrasts. It is as if he were keen that no one key become too dominant or last too long. There must be change and rhythm if his plays are really to give a picture of everyday life. . . . The . . . (intonational directions) that occur most often are those that intimate that a line is to be spoken "happily" and "laughingly" or "sorrowfully" and "in tears". In the play there are some fifteen of each type, which in its own way thus shows how he tries to keep a balance between the contrasting keys.
>
> Some of Chekhov's most usual contrasts juxtapose a lyrical or elated with a banal, everyday atmosphere, a melancholy and serious with a comic atmosphere. It is characteristic for Chekhov that these keys not only succeed each other but are to be found in balance in the same scene.[22]

Each mood created by intonation becomes, in the context of the scene, tragicomic. The Cherry Orchard contains many intonational

directions. Some of these are basically contradictory, i.e., "joyfully in tears". More common is the switching of tone midway through a speech. In the first act, Varya and Anya are each talking of serious and tragic situations, then interrupt themselves by introducing a frivolous note.

> Varya: . . . Everyone's talking of our being married, everyone's congratulating me, and all the while there's really nothing in it; it's all like a dream! (In another tone) You have a new brooch like a bee.
> Anya (mournfully): Mama bought it. (Goes into her own room and in a light-hearted childish tone) And you know, in Paris I went up in a balloon![23]

The mood is constantly fluctuating throughout the play. A tragic note is frequently deflated by a comic intrusion. As Anya and Varya despondently discuss the tragic state of the Ranevsky family, Lopahin sticks his head in the door and "moo's" like a farm animal. When deeply distressed Gaev reverts to comic billiards slang.

Music is also used to shift the mood. Lyubov, lamenting her life, hears distant music which changes her pensive mood to thoughts of a party. On the day of the auction, the melancholy of the situation is juxtaposed with the festivities of the ball. Music is effectively used in O'Casey's play as well. The revelry of the Boyle family juxtaposed with the funeral songs in act two is one poignant example. The culminating example is in the final scene, in Boyle's boisterous ditty which occurs immediately after Juno's prayer.

Gesture also plays an important role in creating a tragicomic effect. Frequently a serious speech is undercut by a comic act. Lopahin enters grandly announcing his role as the new master of the orchard, then accidently tips over the table. Trofimov's pratfall, after his dramatic exit in Act 3, is a similar example. The action of Juno opens to find

Mary with a newspaper containing news of Robbie Tancred's murder in one hand and a hand-mirror in the other. This image introduces a dichotomy (between social consciousness and personal vanity) characteristic of her.

Charlotta's soliloquy in The Cherry Orchard contains a particularly fine example of deflation of serious mood by comic gesture. Her lament creates a solemn tone which is repeatedly punctured. In the midst of her speech she begins to chew on a cucumber. The inclusion of Epihodov's song, a musical parody of her sentiments, further enhances the ironic dimension. The mood which began as pensive and tragic swings between this tone and the comic.

> Charlotta (musingly). I haven't a real passport of my own, and I don't know how old I am, and I always feel that I'm a young thing. When I was a little girl, my mother and father used to travel about to fairs and give performances--very good ones. And I used to dance salto-mortale and all sorts of things. And when papa and mama died, a German lady took me and had me educated. And so I grew up and became a governess. But where I came from, and who I am, I don't know. . . . Who my parents were, very likely they weren't married. . . . I don't know (takes a cucumber out of her pocket and eats). I know nothing at all (a pause). One wants to talk and has no one to talk to. . . . I have nobody.
> Epihodov (plays on the guitar and sings). What care I for the noisy world! What care I for friends or foes! How agreeable it is to play on the mandolin.
> Dunyasha. That's a guitar, not a mandolin. (Looks in the hand-mirror and powders herself.)[24]

The contrapuntal movement of mood is sustained as Charlotta continues her lament, while Epihodov echoes that destiny is merciless with him as well, for he found a cockroach in his kvass.

The use of the naturalistic detail is the basic source of the undercut, serving to illuminate the comic side of a tragic situation. Not only sounds and idiosyncratic behavior (lighting a cigar, chewing a caramel) but smells (the fish-like smell of Yasha's hair cream) serve to

deflate a mood. Serious moments are also reduced by affectations--in gesture and dress, but particularly in speech. Speechifying and rhapsodizing are major sources of comedy in both The Cherry Orchard and Juno, and function as tragicomic devices through the disparity between talk and action in the plays. In O'Casey's play the nobility of the sentiments is undercut by the lack of action to support the words. Mary's concern with the strike, Johnny's concern with principles, and the orations by both Devine and Bentham embody theories contradicted by practice. The captain's rhetorical effusions are undercut not only by his inability to act but by his comic delivery, which like his slow consequential strut characterizes his affected bearing. Erroneous allusion and mispronunciation symbolize the crippled state of language and the impotence of words. The action of The Cherry Orchard centres about a serious situation. There is, however, no realistic concrete attempt to alleviate or cure it. The responses, frequently eloquent and abstract, are incongruous with the problem. The characters are unable to act on their intentions. Trofimov calls for a march forward towards the highest truth, yet cannot find his galoshes. All plans remain only words.

The malady of over-talking in The Cherry Orchard is aggravated by the problem of under-hearing. Such deafness, overt in Firs, characterizes all the conversations in the play. No one hears the others but remains immersed in his own thoughts and daydreams. The use of the non sequitur or meaningless remark symbolizes the deficiency in articulateness of language. Muttering is another paralysis of speech found in the play. Deafness and the inability to communicate lead to a tragicomic effect, for while it is humorous, it is a symptom of the isolation of each character from the others and from reality. This can be illustrated

by any of the discussions about the proposed sale of the orchard. Lopahin's pleas for a decision from Lyubov and Gaev, an attempt at direct confrontation, create dramatic tension. But the energy is dissipated in the oblique response. Neither Gaev nor Lyubov can meet or understand this challenge.

> Lopahin: You must make up your mind, once for all--there's no time to lose. It's quite a simple question, you know. Will you consent to letting the land for building or not? One word in answer: Yes or no? Only one word!
> Lyubov: Who is smoking such horrible cigars here? (Sits down.)
> Gaev: Now the railway line has been brought near, it's made things very convenient (sits down). Here we have been over and lunched in town. Cannon off the white! I should like to go home and have a game.
> Lyubov: You have plenty of time.
> Lopahin: Only one word! (Beseechingly.) Give me an answer!
> Gaev (yawning): What do you say?[25]

The dichotomy between dream and reality is found in O'Casey's play as well. Saros Cowasjee writes: "Broadly speaking, illusion and reality are translated into terms of comedy and tragedy in O'Casey's plays: the frequency of the clashes between the former two determine the rapidity of alternation of comedy and tragedy."[26] David Krause finds that it is only the men who live in illusion, while the women are realists.

> The women in O'Casey's plays are realists from necessity, the men dreamers by default. The men are frustrated and gulled by dreams which they are unable and unwilling to convert into realities. And as if in mock-defense of those dreams they revel in their romanticizing and bragging and drinking.[27]

The tragicomic pattern, then, would occur as the men act as comic foils to the tragically self-aware women, shifting the action from tragic to comic mood[28] (Cowasjee notes that "most scenes featuring women are tragic; most scenes featuring men are comic; and that tragedy and comedy mingle

freely in scenes where men and women appear together").[29] Krause's statement and Cowasjee's implication that the tragicomic is a function of the reactions between characters is, however, only partially true. The primary tragicomic effect is created by the characters' response to the total reality or situation around them. Whereas the everyday foibles and incongruities of domestic life contained elements of the tragicomic, the full tragicomic potential of both The Cherry Orchard and Juno is realized only when these specific activities are juxtaposed with the larger action of the play. The basic action of either play is that of the disintegration of a prevailing order. Against this backdrop, the individual reactions assume greater consequence. A double perspective is thus placed on both the character and the situation, illuminating both the tragic and the comic aspects of each. As one critic has observed about Juno:

> The comic elements are not there for light relief, though they naturally perform that function. However enjoyable or hilarious the alcoholic fantasies and mock heroic gestures may be, the moral irresponsibility of the menfolk . . . is equal in tragic depth to the formal expression of a nation's grief represented in the sufferings of the womenfolk.[30]

In both plays the tragicomic pattern is created by the interrelationship between the gesture (the particular activity) and the situation to which it is a response. While each activity, seen independently, may seem ludicrous, it assumes tragicomic relevance when perceived in the context of the basic action. The audience is always aware of the undercurrent of tragic action that runs through the play, and this adds new dimension to the immediate activity. The action of The Cherry Orchard is set within traditionally tragic patterns. The arrival-departure and spring-autumn structure symbolizes an end or death. In the

play every relationship ends in separation. The attempts to save the orchard have similarly failed, and as the family departs the first axe swings to cut down the orchard. Yet on the immediate level of activity, each response by the characters has been frivolous and trivial. The prime project of the characters was to save the orchard, but our analysis has shown that each attempt was unrealistic and ludicrous. There are many remedies to alleviate a number of ills proposed in the play. Gaev suggests numerous alternatives (none of them viable) to save the orchard. Firs advocates sealing-wax for all complaints. Trofimov's revolutionary rhetoric proposes a cure for the disorders of all Russia. Yet, as Gaev remarks: "If a great many remedies are suggested for some disease, it means the disease is incurable. , . . I have many schemes, a great many, and that really means none."[31] None of the cures can come to fruition. They are incongruous, impotent gestures. The ludicrous activity, however, is never totally divorced from the tragic, for each gesture is a response to the large action, to the process of disintegration and this condition adds new perspective and consequence to it. Against the backdrop of tragedy, each comic element is brought into sharper focus. The contrast makes each gesture increasingly ludicrous. Yet simultaneously a tragic dimension is added, for the ludicrous becomes all the more pathetic.

In O'Casey's play the tragic and comic similarly counterpoint each other. The tragic is shown to be at times as ludicrous as the comic. This can be found in any of the numerous ludicrous responses to a serious or tragic situation. Juno compares Robbie Tancred's corpse to a kitchen utensil: ". . . an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child (has)

gone west with his body made a collandher of."[32] The responses to Tancred's funeral at times suggest spectators at a parade. Noble sentiments and activities are revealed to be as hollow as the captain's affectations. The representative of the union, Jerry Devine, and the spokesman for the "Irish people's National regard for the Dead",[33] Needle Nugent, demonstrate hypocritical behavior, their practice contradicting their words. Yet these inconsistencies add tragic poignancy to both the personal and social levels of existence. Pettiness, pretentiousness, the comic foibles of life are an integral part of the tragedy of the human condition. The comic aspects do not alleviate the tragic sense, as David Krause suggests,[34] but heighten it. They become part of the fabric of tragedy in the play, while maintaining their farcical quality. Captain Boyle's comic refrain: ". . . th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis," is not merely comic relief, but concomitantly is used to intensify the sense of tragedy in the play. This gag line gains consequence as the background of moral, social and political disintegration becomes increasingly prominent. Not only does it add poignancy by contrasting the tragic, but it is increasingly apparent that it is a part of the tragedy, and assumes a tragic valence itself. Its relevance moves from the personal to the social, and by the end of the third act, one critic suggests, "it bears universal connotations commensurate with the tragic chaos of civil war and of slum poverty."[35] The repetition of this phrase gains and adds tragic intensity so that by the final scene it is, in O'Casey's words, both "the comic highlight" and "the tragic highlight too"[36] of the play.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 173.

[2]Ibid., p. 164.

[3]Ibid., p. 173.

[4]Ibid., p. 141.

[5]M. Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, trans. Davidson (London, 1956), quoted in J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1968), p. 58.

[6]August Strindberg, "Foreword to Miss Julie," rpt. in Drama in the Modern World: Plays and Essays, trans. E. Sprigge and ed. Samuel A. Weiss (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1964), p. 80.

[7]Styan, op. cit., p. 62.

[8]A. Skaftymov, "Principles of Structure in Chekhov's Plays," Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by R. L. Jackson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 79.

[9]Sean O'Casey, The Green Crow (New York: George Braziller, 1956), p. 181.

[10]Ibid., p. 182.

[11]"I'm afraid my play has turned out to be not a drama but a comedy and in places even a farce, and I fear Nemirovitch-Danchenko will never forgive me for that." (Letter to Mariya Lilina, Stanislavsky's wife, September 15, 1903), rpt. in Nicholas Moravcevich, "The Dark Side of the Chekhovian Smile," Drama Survey, V (1966-67), p. 251.

[12]David Magarshack, Chekhov the Dramatist (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 42.

[13]J. E. M. Latham, "The Cherry Orchard as Comedy," Educational Theatre Journal, X, No. 1 (March, 1958), p. 29.

[14]Norman Silverstein, "Chekhov's Comic Spirit and The Cherry Orchard," Modern Drama, I (September, 1958), pp. 91-100.

[15]D. C. Gerould, "The Cherry Orchard as Comedy," Journal of General Education, XI (January-October, 1958), pp. 109-22.

[16]J. R. Brandon, "Toward a Middle-View of Chekhov," Educational Theatre Journal, XII, No. 4 (December, 1960), pp. 270-75; Moravcevich, op. cit., pp. 237-51; John Gassner, "The Duality of Chekhov," Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 175-83; Styan, op. cit., pp. 74-104.

[17]P. S. O'Hegarty, "A Dramatist of New-Born Ireland," p. 64; A. E. Malone, "O'Casey's Photographic Realism," p. 70. These articles appear in Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgments, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: MacMillan, 1969).

[18]James Coakley and Marvin Felheim, "Thalia in Dublin: Some Suggestions about the Relationships between O'Casey and Classical Comedy," Comparative Drama, IV (1970), p. 265; Bonamy Dobrée, "Sean O'Casey and the Irish Drama," Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgments, p. 95.

[19]"Vospominanija D. Gorodetskogo," Birzhevye vedomosti (1904), No. 364, rpt. in Skaftymov, op. cit., p. 73.

[20]Beckerman, op. cit., p. 101.

[21]Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, 21 December 1927.

[22]Nils Ake Nilsson, "Intonation and Rhythm in Chekhov's Plays," Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 167.

[23]A. P. Chekhov, "The Cherry Orchard," Drama in the Modern World: Plays and Essays, trans. Constance Garnett and ed. Samuel A. Weiss (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1964), p. 91.

[24]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[25]Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[26]Saros Cowasjee, "The Juxtaposition of Tragedy and Comedy in the Plays of Sean O'Casey," Wascana Review, II, No. 1 (1967), p. 77.

[27]David Krause, Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), p. 75.

[28]Krause, p. 72.

[29]Cowasjee, op. cit., p. 78.

[30]Ronald Ayling, "Introduction," Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgments, pp. 23-24.

[31]Chekhov, op. cit., p. 96.

[32]Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock," Three Plays (London: MacMillan, 1966), p. 47.

[33]Ibid., p. 49.

[34]Krause, op. cit., p. 72.

[35]Ayling, op. cit., p. 19.

[36]Sean O'Casey, in a letter to Cyril Cusack, dated 25 May 1956, quoted in Cowasjee, op. cit., p. 84.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEATRICAL TRAGICOMEDY

> In the twentieth century, as a reaction to the extreme transparency of natural activity, with its loss of theatrical excitement as well as generalized significance, playwrights and performers have experimented with a wide variety of techniques for achieving a viable "artificiality".[1]

A "viable 'artificiality'" such as is here described by Bernard Beckerman has found its fullest expression in what might be defined as theatricality. Discussing the new movement in the theatre, Sheldon Cheney also attributes the tendency toward "re-theatralizing"[2] drama to a dissatisfaction with the "fourth wall convention" of illusionist drama. Whereas in the naturalistic play, the created world is probable and plausible in terms of the real world, the theatrical play involves a self-conscious assertion of the true nature of the theatre. Robert J. Nelson writes that such a play "'shows the seams,' turning the dramaturgy inside out".[3] The stage itself becomes a medium of expression, exposing and capitalizing upon the artificiality of dramaturgical conventions. As a theatrical world it imitates life to some extent, but like a stage set calls attention to its own virtuosity in so doing.[4]

This phenomenon has been labelled by J. L. Styan as "overt theatrical symbolism",[5] and by Grossvogel as "the self-conscious stage".[6] As a method, theatricality involves the use of techniques from the stylized types or stereotypes of theatre as the dominant structural principle. The term "stylized" types of theatre refers to such forms as the Commedia dell'Arte and the Harlequinade, the masquerade, the circus,

the mime or the various forms of musical comedies such as the music-hall revues and vaudeville. The entire play may depend upon one of these forms as the setting, or it may simply borrow particular devices from one or more of them. The characters of the lazzi, the clown, the fool pair, or purely theatre characters such as the "actor", the "producer", the "director" and even the "spectator" may appear in the dramatis personae. Techniques such as the pose, the front, and impersonation are common, and frequently connected with camouflage and the mask. Theatricality may also involve such activities as slapstick buffoonery, inflated or grossly deflated language, verbal repartee and trickery if it is the theatrical aspect of these activities that is emphasized.

While the techniques of the theatrical drama, by drawing attention to themselves as conventions, stress artificiality, the result does not always make the action seem less real but often more real. One of the devices of such theatre is that of the inserted play, or play-within-a-play. This practice dissolves the theatrical illusion as the audience of the external play becomes identified with the audience of the internal one. In many modern plays the characters refer to and address the audience. This device, while emphasizing theatricality, simultaneously makes the production seem more real. One critic notes: "It is as if . . . the whole mechanism of writing, producing and acting --the whole paraphernalia of theatrical illusion--were exorcised and eliminated precisely by being named and exhibited."[7] Writing on the hypocritical nature of naturalism, a modern playwright applauds theatricality:

> Boundless is the power of the theatrical illusion! Just relish that word "the-at-ri-cal"! As to the illusions from "real life",

> they are not needed in the theatre, for the theatre is not a panopticon. Whenever the theatre borrows from life its belongings without submitting them to due transformation, it ends in deplorable and irrevocable failure. All is conventional in the theatre; say "There is no fourth wall on the stage," and you will admit thereby that everything must be shown on the stage in some particular light, in the light of theatricality.[8]

The Russian playwright and director, Nicholas Evreinov, devotes a chapter to "Theatricality in the Theatre" in his work The Theatre in Life. Discussing theatrical illusions he writes: "It is not the subject which must be shown in the theatre, but a picture of this subject, not the action itself, but the representation of the action."[9] This dichotomy is implicit in the very nature of theatre: between the role and the real, the illusion and reality. The use of the theatrical world suggests concern with these themes. Ruby Cohn observes: "Almost as soon as there was a theatre, the world was compared to a stage, and its inhabitants to role-players."[10] Theatricality thus naturally lends itself thematically to expression of and experimentation with the world-stage, man-actor metaphor. The device of role-playing is connected with the discrepancy between act and reality, or the hypothetical "real-life". In the words of Stanley Eskin, it is the "representing in the theatre, the theatrical aspects of life",[11] using the medium of the stage. Theatricality is the concretization or actualization of the world-stage, man-actor metaphor.

This metaphor is found in early Christian writing, in the concept of "theatrum mundi" with God as audience-judge,[12] and is prevalent in Renaissance theatre. The image and the device are found in plays by Shakespeare and Calderón. The motto over the Globe Theatre reads: "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem".[13] The world-stage metaphor has become popular again in the twentieth century. Theatricality in various forms

has been found by many critics as the characteristic of avant-garde drama[14] and by others of all modern drama.[15] Leonid Andreyev in his play He Who Gets Slapped and Luigi Pirandello in his plays examine the fluid boundary between theatre and life through their reflection on role and play. The play by Nicholas Evreinov, A Merry Death, and Beckett's Waiting for Godot similarly rely upon traditional theatrical devices, particularly those from the Commedia dell'Arte. In analyzing how the theatrical framework is conducive to the expression of tragicomedy, the principal focus will be upon Leonid Andreyev's He Who Gets Slapped. Examples from Pirandello's Henry IV, Evreinov's A Merry Death and Beckett's Waiting for Godot will also be used, but only as secondary sources to supplement and illustrate the discussion.

These plays are tragicomedies which use various forms of theatricality as signs with both comic and tragic functions. Andreyev uses the circus as the setting for his play. Pirandello's play exploits the theme of the masquerade. The play deals with a man who out of madness has played the role of Emperor Henry IV for twenty years. Hoping to cure him four people arrive at his villa: his beloved of twenty years ago, her lover, her daughter and the psychiatrist. It happens, however, that for eight years Henry has been sane, but has preferred the splendor of the delusion to the cold shock of return to the modern world. The sight of the daughter reminds him of the past and emotion overcomes his "lucid insanity". When the lover steps forward to stop Henry from embracing her, Henry kills him--and recognizes that he must now wear his mask of madness forever.

Nicholas Evreinov's play A Merry Death is based on the traditional Harlequinade form: the triangle between Harlequin, Columbine and

Pierrot. The use of the character Pierrot as raisonneur, and his final address to the audience adds a new dimension to this structure. Devices from the Commedia dell'Arte and the vaudeville stage are found in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, a play about two tramps waiting for someone who by the end of the play still has not appeared.

In each of these plays stereotyped theatrical devices such as the mask, the affected pose, play-acting, slapstick and verbal games form the basic activities. These devices have traditionally comic functions. The basic tragicomic effect, as will be shown, emerges as this familiar stock-comic framework is given tragic resonance. The stereotyped world gains tragic dimension as the action of the play progresses and two aspects, the comic and the tragic, of character, activity or situation are revealed. That which begins as a contrapuntal or dialectal alternation between two responses develops into a fused or confused reaction. In the plays of Andreyev and Pirandello the same sign becomes ambivalent, both comic and tragic. Beckett and Evreinov also employ a seemingly comic world. The use of direct reference and address to the audience, however, adds personal and social consequence to the activity onstage. Comic antics take on serious implications, and each successive "joke" evokes a guffaw that becomes strained, uneasy and self-consciously reflective. Amused detachment melts with the concomitant concern of the implicated. Ruby Cohn writes: "The worn-out acts of vaudeville and the threadbare devices of drama emphasize our presence at a spectacle, and symbolize our lives."[16] The tragicomic effect thus occurs within the relationship between the world onstage and the outside world:

> Rather than a tension between tragic and comic within the play, there is a tension between the farcical world on . . . [the]

> stage and our awareness of its tragic relevance to our world off the stage, however imprecisely we define tragic, comic and farcical.[17]

The character of the clown or fool has become an increasingly prominent figure in modern drama. The action of the play He Who Gets Slapped centres about the story of a mysterious gentleman-scholar, who, renouncing his past, becomes a clown in the well-known circus owned by Papa Briquet. Although the man has no experience, with the help of the principal clown, Jackson, he conceives an identity and a routine for himself and is hired. In this new life he falls in love with Consuelo, the naive equestrienne star of the circus. Her father, however, is hungry for wealth and intends to sell her into marriage with a wealthy baron. Unable to win her or to stop her father's plans, the clown poisons first Consuelo and then himself.

The clown identity or gimmick which the scholar invents for himself is the role of "He who gets slapped", a part which he claims suits his talent. With the use of this epithet the entire play gains deeper significance as it draws upon the resources of the age-old Fool tradition. The Fool was first defined by St. Chrysotom and more recently by Enid Welsford[18] in her illuminating work on this subject, as "he who gets slapped". Thus Andreyev's hero becomes imbued with a rich and extensive genealogy. The Fool has played many roles in history and literature, from the witty jester whose business it was to delight and entertain, to that of the sage-fool, whose inspired intuition was a mouthpiece of truth and sanity. Fool-literature embraces both the buffoon with his physical clowning and the tragic fool who probes into the meaning of existence. Andreyev's clown, mixing philosophy with

clownery, is closer to the latter species.

Ms. Welsford distinguishes four possibilities for the role of the Fool: ". . . there are those who get slapped, there are those who are none the worse for their slapping, there are those who adroitly change places with the slappers and, occasionally there are those who enquire 'What do slaps matter to the man whose body is of india rubber, and whose mind of quick silver?'"[19] As Willie Sypher notes, the resilience of the comic character is his distinction from the tragic hero.[20] The audience is able to laugh for time after time, the clown is struck with no painful consequence. As He himself remarks: "Clown He can have no rival! Who is there who could stand such a deluge of slaps and not get soaked?"[21] As such, the underdog gains a superiority over his slappers, and encourages the laughter of the audience. Robert Corrigan, in his essay on comedy, finds that "whenever a serious deed is allowed to enter the field of comedy . . . the serious effect must, in some way, be cut off."[22] But if it is not, and the comic and the serious remain and become implicated, the result is that of tragicomedy.

In He Who Gets Slapped the gaiety and carefree laughter become increasingly disturbed as a note of seriousness begins to seep in. There is something strange about He's antics.

> Briquet: I am not satisfied with you today, He. Why do you tease them? They don't like it. . . . A good slap must be clean like a crystal--fft--fft! right side, left side, and done with it. They will like it; they will laugh, and love you. But in your slaps there is a certain bite, you understand, a certain smell--
> He: But they laughed, nevertheless!
> Briquet: But without pleasure, He. You pay, and immediately draw a draft on their bank; it's not the right game--they won't like you.[23]

There is a bitterness in He's clowning, a vague vindictiveness. He has exchanged roles with the crowd and become the superior, in control of the giving and the taking. As he remarks to the gentleman: "What a comedy! How marvellously everything is turned about in this world: the robbed proves to be the robber, and the robber is complaining of theft, and cursing."[24] This turnabout is found as well in the interpretation of the slaps, their reception and bestowal. They are not only laughable and comic, but simultaneously have acquired serious implications. The reaction to the clown He is similarly subject to reinterpretation and reassessment. He is not just the traditional clown, a type figure with no existence or significance beyond his painted smile. Nor is he as resilient as the clown ought to be. His bitterness, the bite in his behavior, suggests that his role is not foolproof, and that there is indeed a man beneath the mask. The slaps do have a sting. Comedy does not allow for such an infirmity. The definition of the comic by Henri Bergson, while not universally relevant, is appropriate here. Bergson defined the comic as something mechanical encrusted upon the living. The comic hero, he felt, is dehumanized because he makes only gestures, automatic motions.[25] This defines the comic nature of He. The highlighting of one dominant trait--that of getting slapped--gives He a mechanical character. However, He is not only a clown. He entered the play as a man, and the role of clown brings additional knowledge. The comic action of the play is interrupted by reminders of and insights into He as a human being. The bitterness in his speech and the something strange in his eyes that Briquet notices, come out from under his mask and reveal his depth as a man. The clown is shown to have emotions, to be able to feel and to suffer. The pathos of this creature functions to arouse pity.

The fool set apart, alienated, beaten and buffeted by slaps, no longer remains only comic, but gains the quality of noble suffering--thus becoming a potentially tragic figure as well. Nietzsche has written: "Suffering makes noble; it separates."[26] In Andreyev's play, the outcast is both comic and tragic.

The fool has traditionally been an outsider, an underdog. Yet this position as outcast also places him in a privileged position. From such a vantage point he is able to see more of reality and gain a fuller perspective of life. As the "punctum indifferens" of the play, the Fool can be the disinterested truthteller and as such is especially suited as critic of and commentator on society and all life. Madness, inspired idiocy combined with physical freakness evict the fool to the periphery of society from where he becomes a spectator and, as such, can see the whole game of life. "He", Harlequin, Henry IV, and Beckett's heroes are all outcasts, and act to provide a more objective view of life. Sitting outside society, each is the detached spectator, free of accepted codes. Each one too is 'slapped', but yet as fool, he is free to mock his assailants and therefore, figuratively, to exchange places with them. The fool vs. society is a pattern found in Andreyev's play (as the circus is juxtaposted with the aristocracy) and is one which occurs in A Merry Death, Henry IV and Waiting for Godot as well. In A Merry Death Harlequin, a rebel, cuckolds the servile Pierrot, the symbol of society. Henry IV, in Pirandello's play, reveals the masquerade of the "real" society. Gogo and Didi, Pozzo and Lucky are all refracted images of the Fool, set in no man's land, commenting on life and society.

The character of the Fool, particularly the theatrical fool, is both physically and psychicly, a violation of the human image. In his

work The Fool and His Scepter, W. Willeford notes: "The costume of the fool actor often expresses (even more immediately than do his words, gestures and actions) qualities characteristic of the fool's inner life."[27] Thus incongruity of dress, for example in Beckett's characters with their too-large trousers and too-small and formless shoes, as well as the chaos of motley in He's costume, suggests psychic aberration, "weak logic and a poor grasp of formal pattern in the outer world".[28] Outer disproportion symbolizes inner chaos. The mental deficiency may be presented as a blessing, an inspired folly, in which the fool is freed of social cares, and leads a carefree life. Henry IV and He wear their roles as means of escape, Henry in the garb of the eleventh century, He in motley and fools cap with bells. This form of madness is positive and allows total freedom which, because the fool is outside society and social roles, is connected with the power of divine intuition and oracular vision. There is, however, a second form of madness--the perverse. As the action of Andreyev's and Pirandello's plays develop, we are shown that far from being a joke, madness is often horrible. It becomes demonic and leads to murder. In the final scene, He changes from his parti-coloured costume to one of red--the colour of the devil.

Beckett's form of the fool is that of the fool pair--Didi and Gogo, and Pozzo and Lucky. The fool frequently has the quality of two-dimensionality. When there is no such pair or couple, the effect is gained by a self-division of the character, to become both fool and a nonfool. The antics of the clown He are not totally foolish, but contain an element of truth to them. He is both a clown and a man. Henry IV has a similar schizophrenic personality, being both mad and sane, both the fool and the most enlightened among the characters. This duality is

played for both its tragic and comic potential. When it becomes impossible to distinguish whether the character is play-acting or serious, being the fool or non-fool, the effect is that of the tragicomic, entertaining while realizing the tragic consequence.

The element of doubleness also toys with audience identification and projection. William Empson writes:

> . . . it is a major activity of the Fool to make a fool of other people, so that this word gives a particularly strong case for . . . the return of the meaning of the word upon the speaker. Every man displays by contrast the folly of the wise, and the clown jeers at his betters; the contradictions that appear in the doctrine were felt to be again, not an obstruction, because they brought out this feeling of mutuality; "I'll call you a fool of one sort speaking as myself a fool of another sort." Indeed on the theory of Socrates, that the fool is he who does not know that he is a fool, any direct use of the word inherently recoils and it can never help being mutual.[29]

The fool-pair or mutuality of the fool and nonfool in a single character is thus expanded to include the relationship between the fool onstage and the audience. This is especially apparent in Beckett's drama in which the fools create riddles or irreducible ambiguities between meaning and meaninglessness. The audience attempts to understand them, to make sense of their riddles which seem so symbolic--until it becomes apparent that there is no answer. Willeford discusses this phenomenon. His observations may be applied in understanding Beckett's play: "It is as though the clowns had conspired with the fool within ourselves; our expectations and our attempts at understanding are thwarted, the energies invested in them are taken up by our sense of identity with the clowns, and we are for the moment as silly as they are."[30] If it is possible to come to terms with the joke laughter restores equilibrium and the audience is returned to its normal image. If, however, this release is not

effected, the mutuality remains, and the joke becomes serious for it is of consequence to the spectator. This serves to partially explain the tragic potential of Waiting for Godot, in which the farcical and trivial activity onstage is given serious consequence by the fact of its implication to the audience and the world of men. The activity onstage involves the audience. The crossing of the boundary between the stage and the auditorium is further achieved by the technique of the direct address to the audience, again amplifying the implication between the two worlds.

While in Beckett's play, the nonfool (audience) changes into fool, in the plays of Andreyev and Pirandello identification between character and audience develops as the fool begins to become a nonfool. The tragic potential of the protagonist in each play is revealed as he is shown to be a man, not a clown. In Evreinov's play there is a balanced reversal, as fools and non-fools exchange positions. This effect is created by the use of Pierrot, a Commedia dell'Arte fool, as raisonneur. At the conclusion of the play, he steps out to address the audience. In the play he played the role of lackey to social codes, and as a result becomes the cuckold of life. Thus he begins the final speech as a stupid fool. Then he breaks out of his role and talks as an actor. From this he switches a third time to that of common man, or play-goer commenting on the play. This technique of turning fool into nonfool also has its farcical side in that as the raisonneur and the audience become progressively identified, the joke falls onto the audience. They have become, in fact, the real Pierrots.

The divisibility of the fool--as both fool and nonfool--leads to a discussion of masks. M. Willson Disher notes that the word mask is

derived from the Arabic word maskharat for clown.[31] The mask is a vital theatrical device in the plays of Andreyev and Pirandello, and an important source of the tragicomic effect.

The mask is a function of the depth of a dramatic character, the relation between his/her outer or surface activity and the inner life.[32] In naturalism or the grotesque play, outer activity is usually a continuation or counterpoint of the inner life. The inner life reveals itself, or if not totally, as in The Cherry Orchard, it is because there is a sense of incompleteness[33] rather than a deliberate camouflaging. In the plays discussed in this chapter, however, the inner feelings of the characters are hidden as the outer activity becomes opaque. As the two are contradictory, there is a duality between being and acting, or reality and appearance. This quality is schematized, particularly by Andreyev and Pirandello by the use of masks, role-playing and play-making.

The dichotomy between being and mask is a major action in He Who Gets Slapped and Henry IV. As was mentioned earlier, both He and Henry IV use their roles as a means of camouflage and escape. Furthermore, the mask occasionally slips to reveal the man beneath. Because these characters are playing games with illusion and reality, and exposing the artificiality or social masks of the "real" outside world, the true nature of every person and gesture becomes ambiguous. The play-making becomes confused with serious endeavour, and eventually it becomes impossible for the audience to distinguish between the two. The games or poses are comical, yet have serious implications. Count Mancini's pretensions are ludicrous, but become serious when they involve the fate of his daughter. The clown He indulges in myth-making about himself as a god, and Consuelo as a goddess. Yet there are indications that he is

serious, that the man beneath the mask is really in love. When Consuelo stops him with a slap of reality, he switches back to the mask and pretends he was playing. He's conflict between game and reality, which is both ludicrous and pathetic, is matched by his confusion of these levels of activity: being and mask. In the ring, the clown's confusion of reality is funny. A clown who pretends to be a philosopher is laughter-evoking, and is stopped by a slap. But when the clown forgets he is only playing, and not really a philosopher or a god, the result is also tragic. There is a tragicomic clash between mask and being. Pirandello's play is similarly based upon a confusion of various levels of realities for its tragicomic effect. The plays of both Andreyev and Pirandello are concerned with the collision between double realities. A critic writing on Pirandello makes an observation that is relevant to Andreyev as well. "There is something comical and grievous at the same time in that crash," writes Budel. "The crash is comical because it lays bare the intrinsic unreliability of human construction (masks), but grievous too, because however flimsy, the demolished structure did afford some shelter from the mad storm of life."[34] The tragicomic effect is heightened when an attempt is made to recover the shelter, to escape again into illusion.

Another major device that functions as tragicomic is that of "unmasking". Andreyev presents a face, which is painted with a comic smile. Pirandello introduces a madman. This mask is one level of their being. On another level, however, as the action develops, the face is being progressively "unmasked", and the human potential of the character is revealed. Both levels are maintained, and a contrapuntal action occurs, as the focus alternates between levels. The surface activity, that of the mask, is presented as comical. The concomitant revelation

of the inner life illuminates the tragic aspect. However, the mask, once an escape, becomes a prison. This situation assumes tragic overtones while simultaneously maintaining its farcical value. Even the very fact that both being and mask exist is tragicomic. Some critics such as Nathan Scott[35] have argued that escape is the subject of tragedy, while others such as Enid Welsford,[36] Wylie Sypher[37] and Richard Corrigan[38] find that it is the material of comedy. In the plays discussed, both positions are right, for escape into mask has both comic and tragic consequence(s). The mask of illusion and the slap of reality are the tragicomic themes of these plays.

Theatrical gesture is another source of tragicomedy in many modern plays. The use of comic gesture, such as slapstick and buffoonery, is used to great advantage particularly by Andreyev and Beckett. As mentioned earlier, these gestures are frequently stock activity of some form of theatre, from the lazzi of the Commedia dell'Arte, the slapstick of the circus, the verbal play of the vaudeville or music hall revue, or the mime of film clowns. Waiting for Godot uses all of these techniques. The pulling on and off of the boots, the derby decked clown reminiscent of Chaplin, the hat pantomime (three hats for two heads) with its suggestion of pure Laurel and Hardy, the slapstick falls of the four characters, as well as the cross talk of vaudeville comic couples are exploited as vehicles for arousing laughter. The very image of the clown has become a comic device. The image of the circus is suggested by the actions of Pozzo and his whip and his bearing certainly suggests a ring master. A large part of the script of this play is devoted to stage directions, which emphasize physical gesture and facial expression. The exaggerated body movements are similar to those of a clown who even when dejected so

distorts his countenance and pose as to evoke laughter. Even when contemplating suicide, the concomitant gesture is so ludicrous (i.e., Estragon with his trousers fallen down around his ankles) that the seriousness is lost in guffaws. This gamut of comic gesture takes on serious valence when the context in which they occur is examined. Each comic act becomes symbolic. As Bernard Beckerman notes:

> Samuel Beckett . . . shows . . . how isolation of an activity from its context and concentration upon it as a purely opaque act divests the activity of its representational connotation and invests it with symbolic potential. Every activity . . . (because it) is so sharply defined, suggests a broader range of action than a literal understanding of the activity would ordinarily denote. The activity tends to be bodily on the one hand and theatrical on another. Vaudeville routines and story telling are two such examples. A connection between stage life and actual life offstage does not seem possible, because the activity is not a mirror of the <u>way</u> people live. Yet in such an activity as Clov wheeling Hamm around the room, an analogue of action is suggested or rather the idea of an action. Does the activity symbolize man's inescapability from his confinement in his body or on this earth? . . . One is tempted to pursue such strict allegory because the link between activity and action is left so vague, so haunting, that we are continually trying to define it.[39]

In Andreyev's play, the slapstick routines have less direct consequence for the audience, and hence the quality of their symbolic value is not one which involves audience identification. These comic acts bear relevance only in the understanding of the character of the clown He. The mask, the painted smiles, the slaps, the poses in the ring and offstage have been given not only comic valence, but because of the revelation of the pathos beneath these gestures, each comic activity is simultaneously converted into an aspect of the human tragedy. Each successive comic gesture becomes subject to a second interpretation, that of its tragic implications for the hero. The gesture becomes tragicomic in Beckett's play when the comic act becomes symbolic, implicating the

real world, and thus combining the ludicrous and the serious. In Andreyev's play, the tragicomic gesture deepens our understanding of the clown's predicament but implies no reflection upon our own.

The major tragicomic device employed within the plays discussed in this chapter is that of ambivalence. One sign is given two interpretations--a comic and a serious or tragic one, so that when that sign is presented, two reactions are simultaneously evoked. The ending of these plays, however, operates upon a different tragicomic principle--that of ambiguity. Rather than have two opposing, but distinct reactions, the ending allows for no definite conclusion. There is no defined outcome, and the resultant effect is one of confusion and uncertainty. In none of these plays is the dénouement clearly comic or tragic. The clown He dies in his illusion and Henry IV returns to his role-playing. Is the pursuit of illusion tragic, or does the game merely continue, and if so is the absurdity of such a situation laughable or serious? The plays by Evreinov and Beckett have a similarly inconclusive ending. The authors give no hint as to how to interpret the result. Is it tragic or just a game or a joke? This quandary in itself becomes tragicomic.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1970), p. 126.

[2]Sheldon Cheney, The New Movement in the Theatre (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), p. 16.

[3]Robert J. Nelson, Play within a Play (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. ix.

[4]Beckerman, op. cit., p. 249.

[5]J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 113.

[6]David I. Grossvogel, The Self-Conscious Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

[7]Stanley G. Eskin, "Theatricality in the Avant-Garde Drama," Modern Drama, VII (Sept. 1964), p. 220.

[8]Nicholas Evreinov, The Theatre in Life, ed. and trans. Alexander I, Nazaroff (New York: Brentano's, 1927), p. 147.

[9]Ibid., p. 142.

[10]Ruby Cohn, Currents in Contemporary Drama (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1969), p. 198.

[11]Eskin, op. cit., p. 218.

[12]Cohn, loc. cit.

[13]Evreinov, op. cit., p. 46.

[14]Stanley G. Eskin, "Theatricality in the Avant-Garde Drama," loc. cit.; Ruby Cohn, "A Comic Complex and Complex Comic," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. R. W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 438.

[15]David I. Grossvogel, The Self-Conscious Stage; Nicholas Evreinov, The Theatre in Life; Lionel Abel, Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).

[16]Ruby Cohn, "A Comic Complex," loc. cit.

[17]Cohn, Currents, p. 161.

[18]Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), p. 278.

[19]Ibid., pp. 323-24.

[20]Wylie Sypher, "Meanings of Comedy," Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 44.

[21]Leonid Andreyev, He Who Gets Slapped, trans. Gregory Zilboorg (New York: Brentano's, 1922), p. 92.

[22]Robert W. Corrigan, "Comedy and the Comic Spirit," Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 7.

[23]Andreyev, op. cit., p. 59.

[24]Ibid., p. 105.

[25]Henri Bergson, "Laughter," Comedy: Meaning and Form, pp. 474-75.

[26]Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted by Wylie Sypher, op. cit., p. 46.

[27]William Willeford, The Fool and His Scepter (Evanston: Northwestern U. P., 1969), p. 21.

[28]Ibid.

[29]William Empson, The Structure of Complex Words (New York: New Directions, 1951), pp. 107-8.

[30]Willeford, op. cit., p. 52.

[31]M. Willson Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes (London: Constable, 1923), pp. 28-29.

[32]Beckerman, op. cit., p. 219.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Oscar Budel, Pirandello (New York: Hillary House, 1966), p. 53.

[35]Nathan Scott, "The Bias of Comedy and the Narrow Escape into Faith," Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 90.

[36]Welsford, op. cit., p. 232.

[37]Sypher, op. cit., p. 54.

[38]Corrigan, op. cit., p. 3.

[39]Beckerman, op. cit., pp. 125-26.

CHAPTER V

THE GROTESQUE TRAGICOMEDY

As a leading theorist of drama has written: "In every play the writer presumes a background which he shocks or reconfirms."[1] The background is composed of the social and psychological values of the audience, or in other words, social decorum. There is also an artistic decorum which is based upon those theatrical conventions to which the audience is accustomed and which it expects. The grotesque play is based upon such a familiar world, but then goes on to violate both these codes so radically and suddenly as to create a sense of shock within the audience. Defining this phenomenon, Murray B. Peppard writes:

> . . . a play which successfully fulfills the requirements of the grotesque must proceed from a model of the world that contains sufficient verisimilitude to permit a realist approach to people and events. Normally understood objective reality must appear in concrete form before the spectator experiences any disorientation or Weltverfremdung.[2]

The divergence from a familiar world is so extreme that a sense of alienation is created within the audience. As Wolfgang Kayser emphasizes in his work The Grotesque in Art and Literature, the grotesque is the estranged world,

> . . . the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us . . . suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous. It is our world which has to be transformed. Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque. . . . We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable. . . .[3]

Relying upon a background, the grotesque involves a comparison between the norm and the distortion. This distortion may produce the

effect of horror, as Kayser emphasizes, or it may contain aspects of the comic. G. Santayana brings out the latter feature of this phenomenon:

> Something analogous to humour can appear in plastic form, when we call it the grotesque. This is an interesting effect produced by such a transformation of an ideal type as exaggerates one of its elements or combines it with other types.[4]

Willie Sypher also aligns the grotesque closer with comedy. "After all," he writes, "comedy, not tragedy, admits the disorderly into the realm of art; the grotesque depends upon an irrational focus. Ours is a century of disorder and irrationalism."[5] These aspects of the grotesque are summed up by Peter Johnson who writes: ". . . the grotesque involves a comparison with an ideal type which is produced by exaggerating or distorting the real world and which causes reactions ranging from uneasy laughter to fascinated horror."[6]

The duality of the response which can be evoked by the grotesque suggests certain functional similarities with tragicomedy. In his work on the grotesque Philip Thomson emphasizes the fact that this phenomenon is a form which evokes a mixture of mutually hostile reactions, the comic with the pathetic or horrifying. This would seem to define the relationship between the grotesque and tragicomedy, yet Thomson distinguishes between the two according to a dubious criterion.

> It is the merging and intermingling of comedy and pathos in such scenes. We have to do here not with tragicomedy in the normal sense--where clear distinction or alternation between the comic and tragic takes place, each keeping to its appointed realm as it were--but with the grotesque fusion of the two. Tragi-comedy points only to the fact that life is alternately comic and tragic, the world is now a vale of tears, now a circus. The grotesque . . . has a harder message. It is that the vale of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy is in some ways tragic and pathetic. This is perhaps the most profound meaning of the grotesque. . . .[7]

This, however, is also the most profound meaning of tragicomedy. The correlation and mutuality of comedy and tragedy has been the basic premise of writers in the modern world. The genre of tragicomedy operates upon the principle of the reciprocity between the comic and the tragic. Thomson's distinction between tragicomedy and the grotesque becomes, therefore, inadmissible.

Karl S. Guthke, while strongly emphasizing the quality of tragicomedy as a fusion of opposing elements, and as an identification of the comic and tragic as one, is also, however, reluctant to connect tragicomedy with the grotesque, but on different grounds. He distinguishes between them according to the degree of verisimilitude found in each and its effect. Tragicomedy, he argues, is bound by a more traditional concept of reality, and thus is more reassuring and stable. The tragicomic world remains within the confines of logic and what is generally accepted as the common characteristics of reality. It refuses to distort the world in such a way that we find it hard to recognize it as ours.[8] The grotesque, on the other hand, is a world gone mad, so strange as to be uncanny and demonic. It is much more disoriented and hence more unsettling. Guthke's theory, however, is not supported by the practice, in fact being contradicted by such modern tragicomedies as Jarry's Ubu Roi, O'Casey's The Silver Tassie, Durrenmatt's The Visit and the entire gamut of Beckett's plays. Some degree of abnormality and perversity, as well as a profusion of anaturalistic devices, is apparent in all of these.

Other theoreticians and critics are far more disposed to acknowledge the affinity. Kayser writes that:

> Beginning with the dramatic practice of the Sturm and Drang and the dramatic theory of Romanticism, tragicomedy and the

> grotesque are conceptually related, and the history of the grotesque is largely one with that of tragicomedy.[9]

Thomas Mann has written:

> I feel that, broadly and essentially, the striking feature of modern art is that it has ceased to recognize the categories of tragic and comic, or the dramatic classifications, tragedy and comedy. It sees life as tragicomedy, with the result that the grotesque is its most genuine style. . . .[10]

The grotesque then, like the tragicomedy, may be used to summon up the pathetic or horrific as well as the comic. One device, commonly exploited by the grotesque, is that of physical abnormality. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his work on Rabelais, devotes an extremely interesting chapter to the grotesque body.[11] The physical abnormalities in the grotesque world, he suggests, usually involve external features such as bodily protrusions or concavities.

> The grotesque body . . . is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world . . . . This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization; . . . Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. . . . In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.[12]

Images of consumption (devouring, swallowing, drinking), elimination (defecation, spitting, sweating) and of dismembered parts are

common in the grotesque body.[13] These images, furthermore, are erotic and involve sexual double entendre. The physical excesses found in folk literature, the carnival, the ancient satyr plays and the Commedia dell'-Arte combined grotesquerie with exaggerated sexual suggestiveness and bizarre obscenity.

These characteristics abound in many modern tragicomedies employing the grotesque. Jarry, Beckett, O'Casey and Durrenmatt all use the grotesque body in their plays. Alfred Jarry's play, Ubu Roi, however, stands as the locus classicus of this style in modern drama. The play was hailed as shocking with its total abandonment of social and moral codes as it gave way to physical excesses. On the sound level, Jarry employed coarse grating phonemes, mutating words such as "merde" into an even harsher sound by adding another velar to form "merdre". The language used is also coarse, and exuberantly obscene. Crude oaths and insults abound, all of which emphasize the grotesque body. The verbal inventions which punctuate the speech, while ingenious, are all based on vulgarisms. Frequent anatomical references convey the physicality of Ubu's world. Imagery is based on vulgar and physical associations. The costumes, Jarry suggests, should be "sordid, to make the play appear more wretched and horrific".[14] Orgiastic consumption and images of defecation emphasize the physical nature of Ubu's world. They are the sources of both laughter and horror. Ubu's threats and practice of dismemberment create an effect simultaneously comic and perverse. Lust, gluttony as forms of bodily excesses, together with mass slaughter--consumption and elimination, form the sources of the grotesque in Jarry's tragic farce.

The grotesque body is also present in the plays of Samuel Beckett. The play Waiting for Godot contains many comments and activities

implying sexual perversity. A tone of obscenity is created and in this context the images of elimination of consumption and of death become highly suggestive. Gogo's sucking on a carrot, the characters sucking the chicken bones and the image of Pozzo reflectively drawing on his pipe are sources of sexual double entendre. Didi's accusation that Pozzo is mistreating Lucky is expressed through an image of consumption. Lucky is compared to a banana. "After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a . . . like a banana skin."[15] Death too is viewed as highly erotic. Gogo suggests that he and Didi hang themselves. Didi responds: "Hmm. It'd give us an erection,"[16] a remark which Gogo finds extremely exciting. In Beckett's play and the one by Jarry, physical and sexual deviation are more a source of laughter than of pathos or horror. The references to anatomical abnormalities are expressed as obscene jokes and hence the grotesque is used to emphasize the farcical rather than tragic tone.

The Silver Tassie by Sean O'Casey, however, and to a lesser extent Durrenmatt's The Visit, employ the grotesque to heighten the tragic effect. In The Silver Tassie in particular, the grotesque functions to create a sombre, horrific mood. The action of this play centres about a young Irishman, Harry Heegan. In the first act he is the embodiment of strength, masculinity and victory. He has just won the ultimate award for soccer, and as the act concludes is on his way to France to fight in the war. Wounded in battle, however, he returns home a symbol of impotence, paralyzed from the waist down. The horrors of war, however, are most poignantly portrayed in the second act of the play, and it is in this act that the grotesque predominates. The principal character, Harry Heegan, and most of the other characters central to the major action,

are absent in this act, and the focus is primarily on the setting and the dialogue of unnamed soldiers. The abstract setting and the speech of the anonymous characters concentrate the action upon expressing the horrors of war by interrelating images of death and mutilation with images of debauchery, bawdy songs and perverse double entendre. Death and gore are bizarrely juxtaposed with images of the "white-flesh'd breasts of a judy". Thoughts of whoring and suggestive curses mingle with the shattered bodies. There is a macabre effect created by the juxtaposing of images of procreation and fertility with those of death. Even the props, "two lacerated fingers of stone . . . lean dead hands are protruding. Further on spiky stumps of trees . . ."[17] are sexually suggestive as phalli, but included is the bizarre fact that they also symbolize death. This grotesque imagery is continued into the last act in which the impotent, crippled Harry--himself a spiky tree stump--"The rising sap in trees I'll never feel"[18] pursues the wanton wench, Jessie, who portrays life and fertility. Harry's song is one of death, while Sylvester insinuates that this Negro Spiritual suggests to Mrs. Foran more the negro than the spiritual: "Bringin' before you glistenin' bodies of blacks, coilin' themselves an' shufflin' an' prancin' in a great jungle dance."[19] Again, the image of death is constrasted with energy, activity, life and fertility. The ludicrous and farcical elements in the play serve not to detract from but rather to emphasize the horror of the situation and its pathos which a purely tragic portrayal might overdo and destroy. As one critic notes: "For O'Casey the grotesque was a means of expressing tragedy and horror on a large scale, without topping the drama into complete pathos or melodrama, though often skirting the edge of both."[20] The images of life act as a norm against which the grotesque incongruity is

contrasted, and this contrast serves to heighten the effect of the horrors of war.

The Visit by Friedrich Durrenmatt also uses the bodily grotesque as a major vehicle for the tragicomic effect. While sexual suggestiveness is more pronounced and farcical than in O'Casey's play, the horror and tragedy are more emphatic than in the plays of Jarry or Beckett. Images of perverse sexuality dominate the play. The themes of consumption and plunder are emphasized. Food scenes (a traditional source of the grotesque in art)[21] eating, drinking, smoking and consumerism abound. Sexual appetite is included as well, and given a perverse effect. Claire is shown to be an old whore consuming husbands. It is fitting that Ill be the proprietor of the general store, for he becomes a consumer good himself. The motif of the hunt--in which Ill is the prey--is another aspect of the theme of sexual consumption. Innuendoes such as Claire's attention to the protruding Adam's apple of the school-boy, and her admiration of the body of the gymnast heighten the tone of sexual aggressiveness within the play, and make it a horrifying carnal carnival.

Images of elimination and dismemberment are also vital to the grotesque nature of the play. The setting of the play is in Guellin, which, it has been noted, is the Swiss-German word for liquid manure.[22] Claire herself is connected with this town by the outhouse built by her father. Elimination in Claire is in the form of dismemberment. She has castrated, literally, her two servants, and figuratively she has gobbled up her entire retinue of servants and the husbands. She herself is half artificial, with a wooden leg and a hand made of ivory.

The grotesque imagery of the play is based upon the theme of transformation. Animate objects become lifeless (i.e., Claire's limbs;

the castrati who chatter meaningless and mechanical sounds), while inanimate objects become animated, and even trees are able to talk. Physical abnormality arises from the metamorphosis of people, places, things and concepts. On the one hand, the cycle of death--fertility--life is invoked as Guellen rises from ruin and decay to renewed life and fruition. And yet, concomitantly, the reverse is also apparent. The townspeople lose the humanity they prided themselves on, and become savages, consumed by greed.

The processes of transformation, while both ludicrous and horrific, serve as well to underline the tragedy which occurs in the midst of these grotesque situations. While his townsmen fall deeper into their self-deceptions, Ill emerges from being a shallow bourgeois speculator to become a noble and self-aware hero. The more ludicrous and inhuman the people's actions, the more the tragic sense is invoked by Ill's increasing consciousness. Ill's awareness also serves as a contrast to the townspeople's fallen state, their greed and corruption.

Claire Zachanassian's sense of humour is another ironic comment on the moral state of the citizens of Guellen. Her detachment from social codes, the prerogative of the king or fool, functions to illuminate the humour in the pretensions of the people. Beyond social or moral codes, she enjoys the ironic discrepancies between their ideals and reality. She views their rationalizations and pretensions with cynical detachment. Yet simultaneously this same detachment emphasizes her inhumanity and is a source of horror in the play. As she is beyond human weaknesses, so is she beyond all humanity. Claire, the young vibrant girl who left Guellen, returns transformed into something unnatural and inhuman, a stone idol. Everyone associated with her is in various stages

of moral or physical death. All values become perverted. Love is transformed in Claire into a twisted evil thing. The hoped for rejuvenation of Guellen made the townsmen look to Claire as a redeemer. With her money and power she becomes indeed a deity, but an inhuman one, invoking a mood of cosmic cruelty.

This motif of cosmic cruelty is common in the grotesque world which is frequently associated with the demonic. William Butler Yeats, after witnessing the premiere of Jarry's play Ubu Roi in 1896, was convinced that henceforth all European literature would be dominated by the "Savage God".[23] Ubu is a sadistic, cruel autocrat, whimsically mutilating and slaying his subjects. In Beckett's play, Godot never comes, mocking the "vague supplication or prayer" of the tramps. There is an implication of "cosmic cruelty" in O'Casey's play in that the privileged officers pull the strings from on high, with no compassion for their fellowmen.

Claire Zachanassian is the savage god in The Visit. Her red hair and black robes suggest both the mythical Greek Fates or some element of the demonic ascending from hell. With her wealth she is a semi-deity. She embodies the concept of omnipotence which leaves man in a state of subservience, imperfection and sin. Claire's power is perverse and sinister. From her balcony, she tempts and corrupts the men. Topographically, her perch from the balcony suggests her control of the town, and as a "deity" she is more a puppeteer pulling the strings. The townspeople have been changed into marionettes. The demonic grotesque is the irruption of the savage God--a cruel, inhuman force, which causes weird and perverse transformations. This functions to create the feeling of alienation and detachment in the audience.

Some form of distortion or transformation has been present in the structure of the grotesque in the plays examined. The created world of each was a distortion of the natural order in the real world. A distortion or changing of a system of values and morals was central to the theme of these plays. This was represented in the metamorphoses of physical elements, i.e., reshaping (as in Ubu's body) or mutilation; the combining of disparate elements into alien though recognizable forms; or by the inversion of known functions, in which animate and inanimate objects exchange properties. The grotesque arises from the juxtaposing of sexual, carnal images of life with motifs symbolic of death. This chaos of inverted values and functions, and of converted forms was objectivized in Yeats' principle of the savage god. Kayser attributes this chaos as the incomprehensible, inexplicable and impersonal "It". "One could use another descriptive phrase and characterize the grotesque as the objectivation of the 'It', the ghostly 'It'--. . . the 'It' which Ammann defined as the third meaning of the impersonal pronoun."[24] Durrenmatt writes: ". . . the grotesque is only a way of expressing in a tangible manner, of making us perceive physically the paradoxical, the form of the unformed. . . ."[25] The effect of the distortions or chaotic transformations may be viewed as comic or tragic, but neither view is free of an element of horror. Unlike caricature which also deforms through ludicrous exaggeration but functions as comic, in the grotesque any comic or tragic element becomes associated with the perverse, the macabre or the bizarre. "In contrast to the distortions of caricature which render the already familiar even more familiar, the grotesque seems, indeed, to be an artistic expression of an unfamiliar (i.e., alien and threatening) world, though both caricature and the grotesque may contain

an element of the ludicrous."[26]

The distinguishing characteristics of the grotesque are those of exaggeration, disharmony and "the ambivalently abnormal".[27] The tragic elements (i.e., in The Silver Tassie and The Visit) were mixed with the ludicrous in the image of senseless death and killing, both effects so emphasized as to create the effect of horror. Nor were the comic elements exempt from the horrific. Humour, writes Hans P. Gluth, makes the grotesque more "bearable" in The Visit, "it helps establish aesthetic distance".[28] "Thus the role of the audience becomes contemplation rather than identification, and the purgation by pity and fear is kept from taking the form of a steam bath of violent emotions."[29] Yet, as we have seen, humour has not disarmed or liberated the tension, but rather implicated the tragic and the horrific. Claire's sense of humour, the presence of the comic chattering castrati, and the delusions of the townspeople serve rather to deepen the sense of the tragedy of Guillen and of Ill, and to heighten the horror. The distortions and transformations can be seen as simultaneously humorous and frightening. Humour does not function as comic relief in these plays. The comic or farcical elements do not create a tone of lightness or playfulness, but serve to heighten the tension. In The Silver Tassie the preponderance of farcical devices are anxiety-creating and are used to amplify the intensity in the play. It becomes more ominous and tragic in its effect. Thus the comic, rather than alleviate the horror or pathos by alienating or distancing the audience, is often more tension-producing.

Kayser found the function of the grotesque to be the attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world.[30] This effect of "exorcising the demon" does not however occur in any of the grotesque

tragicomedies examined. Giving shape to the shapeless has not proven adequate to "manage" the demon. There is neither resolution nor relief from the tension. The comic cannot alleviate or remove the tragic or horrific for it is a part of it--a reciprocal condition for it. In Ubu Roi, Waiting for Godot, The Silver Tassie and The Visit the synthesis of the comic and the horrific both liberates and inhibits. Pathos is related to the ludicrous, and the comic is wed to the horrific. The tension between the responses (identification vs. alienation) is similar to that found in "Gallow's humour", in which both laughter and tears are evoked, but in the end neither seems quite adequate or appropriate.

In the grotesque tragicomedy the comic and the tragic are so exaggerated that each becomes a source of the horrific. The effect of ambiguity or of ambivalence is related to the sense of shock, horror and disorientation produced by the grotesque world. Both Thomson[31] and Guthke[32] emphasized the essentially abnormal nature of the grotesque and the radical means of presenting this abnormality. In the plays examined in the preceding two chapters, the tragicomic was largely the result of the harmonious integration of heterogeneous elements and effects. The grotesque tragicomedy, however, is characterized by the concentration upon the clash or conflict of disparate elements. The essential criterion of tragicomedy, that of reciprocity between dissimilar elements, is maintained, but it is the emphasis upon disharmony, both within the work and in the reaction it produces, that is the fundamental characteristic of the grotesque tragicomedy.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 140-41.

[2]Murray B. Peppard, "The Grotesque in Durrenmatt's Dramas," Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly, IX (1962), p. 37.

[3]Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 184-85.

[4]George Santayana, The Sense of Beauty (New York: Modern Library, 1955), p. 256.

[5]Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. R. W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 23.

[6]Peter Johnson, "Grotesqueness and Injustice in Durrenmatt," German Life and Letters, XV (1962), p. 266.

[7]Philip Thomson, The Grotesque, The Critical Idiom Series, No. 24, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 63.

[8]Karl S. Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 74.

[9]Kayser, op. cit., p. 54.

[10]Thomas Mann, Past Masters and Other Papers, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (London: M. Secker, 1933), pp. 240-41.

[11]Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1965).

[12]Ibid., p. 317.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Alfred Jarry, Letter to Lugné-Poe in 1896, rpt. in Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi, trans. Barbara Wright (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. x.

[15]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 23.

[16]Beckett, p. 12.

[17]Sean O'Casey, "The Silver Tassie," Collected Plays, Vol. II (London: MacMillan, 1964), p. 35.

[18]Ibid., p. 94.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ronald Ayling, "Introduction" to Sean O'Casey: Modern Judgments, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: MacMillan, 1969), p. 23.

[21]Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 303.

[22]Kurt J. Fickert, "Wit and Wisdom in Durrenmatt's Names," Contemporary Literature, XI, No. 3 (1971), p. 384.

[23]William Butler Yeats, Autobiography (New York: MacMillan, 1953), p. 210.

[24]Kayser, op. cit., p. 185.

[25]Friedrich Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," The Modern Theatre: Readings and Documents, ed. Daniel Seltzer (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 67.

[26]Robert E. Helbling, "The Function of the Grotesque in Durrenmatt," Satire Newsletter, IV (1966), p. 13.

[27]Thomson, op. cit., p. 27.

[28]Hans P. Gluth, "Durrenmatt's 'Visit': The Play Behind the Play," Symposium, XVI (1962), p. 100.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Kayser, op. cit., p. 188.

[31]Thomson, op. cit., p. 26.

[32]Guthke, op. cit., p. 75.

AFTERWORD

The purposes of this thesis were both theoretical and practical. After examining earlier varieties of tragicomedy, it became evident that contemporary tragicomedy was fundamentally different and that a definition of it as a modern phenomenon was required. The definition proposed was one which reflected the inability of modern critics and playwrights to distinguish any inherent morphological or thematic demarcations between comedy and tragedy. Any discussions of either of these two genres have been restricted to considering the effect or function of an element in the context in which it appears. Hence, a context could be so structured that one element could evoke two responses simultaneously, the comic and the tragic, to produce the tragicomic.

The principal concern of this thesis was an examination of how this effect was created in the various kinds of modern tragicomic plays. Modern tragicomedy was divided into three major types according to the dominant method of representation employed: as to whether the means and materials used reflected a naturalistic world, a theatrical world or the grotesque. While many critics have referred to the organization of tragicomedy into different modes, none have actually classified and analyzed these frameworks in this way. Thus, while the categories suggested herein are not wholly novel, this thesis undertook to present a more detailed and comprehensive examination of them and their relation to tragicomedy.

However, because the immediate concern of the thesis was with generic features, the analysis of individual plays was necessarily limited. The references to specific plays served primarily to illustrate and support

the argument. But while the attention to the plays themselves was incomplete, the discussions presented in the thesis were made with practical analysis in mind. The possibilities of such study suggest themselves as a particularly fruitful area for further research. For example, the classification of Andreyev's play, He Who Gets Slapped, as a theatrical tragicomedy and the suggestion of its relation to the "fool" tradition in literature introduced a totally new perspective for its analysis. Consequently, the material presented in this thesis will serve not only to broaden the understanding of modern tragicomedy but also, ideally, to stimulate and suggest new insights into the plays and to provide a basis from which such analysis can proceed.

As has been observed, research into comedy, tragedy, or tragicomedy has been hampered by the lack of adequate and precise definitions or way of defining these terms. The various schools of structuralism, in their concern with exact and scientific (i.e., verifiable) methodology, have contributed many significant insights into the nature of versification and, more recently, into narrative modes. Surprisingly little attention, however, has been paid to drama and/or the dramatic genres. With the exception of the work Dynamics of Drama in which Bernard Beckerman proposes a theory and method of structural analysis for dramatic form, drama has been largely neglected and structural analyses of the dramatic genres virtually non-existent. At present, regardless of how "objective" or "disciplined" the drama critic may attempt to be, by being confined to discussing effect or function, his statements must ultimately remain impressionistic. The discussion of tragicomedy in this thesis was largely restricted to such an approach. The actual examination of the types of modern tragicomedy, however, sought to incorporate and implement

more structural concerns. The very classification into types provides a basis which could eventually lead to more scientific and exact analyses. It becomes increasingly evident that a structural approach to drama, particularly to the dramatic genres, is an area particularly essential and challenging for future investigation.

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